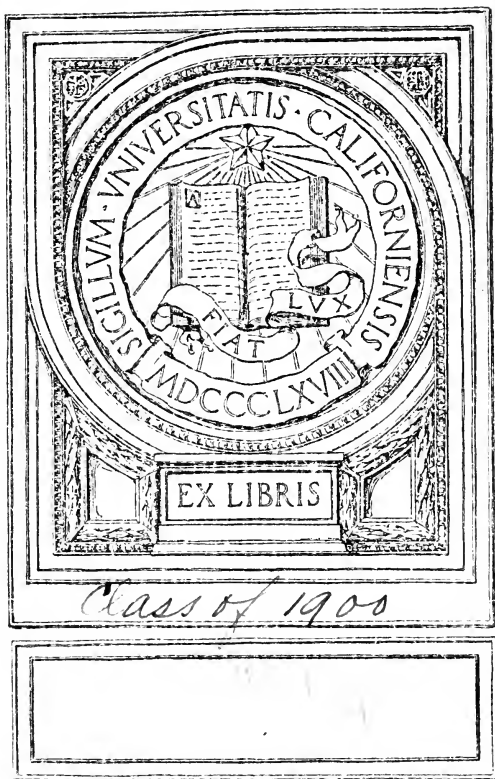


THE HUSBAND TEST

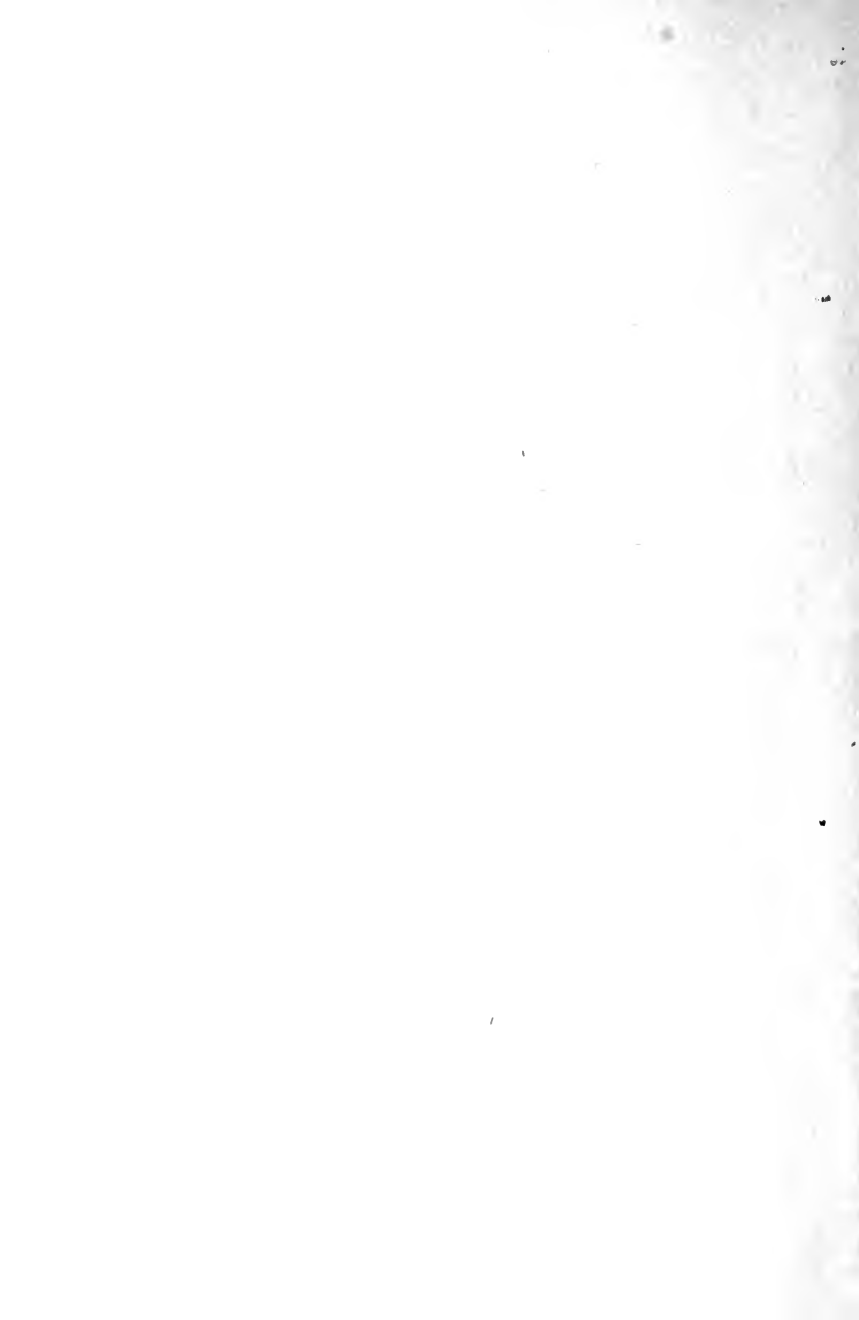
MARY CAROLYN DAVIES





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The Husband Test

By
MARY CAROLYN DAVIES

Frontispiece by
ELIZABETH PILSBRY

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The Husband Test

CHAPTER I

BETTINA OF THE BOURGEOISIE

ANARCHISM and baths would be a political combination hard to conquer.

But that they will ever be combined is doubtful. The leaders who insist on baths alone, overlook the adventurous part of one's nature to which anarchism makes its eternal appeal; and those who insist on anarchism alone, forget that, if stifled too long, the part of one's nature which craves baths, will arise and assert itself.

As society is constituted now, we must each make our fateful choice. The world is lined up into two "sides," like a spelling match, each side glaring at the other and resolved to spell it down. This is what divided New York into "Uptown" and "The Village."

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Uptown is a place where people have clean table napkins and no ideas; and Greenwich Village, where they have any number of ideas, but no clean table napkins. The denizens of these two different countries never mingle; of course, natives of each go slumming into the hostile territory, but slumming can on no account be said to be mingling. A slumming expedition is undertaken for the purpose of criticizing while it is going on, and of boasting afterward. One goes for the reason one climbs mountains, not for the sake of any inherent pleasure, but only to say one has done it.

Parties of women who live at the Astor come with their escorts to Polly's, and the cellar of the Brevoort, and to the Pow-wow, and Marie's, level spiritual lorgnettes at anyone who happens to be sitting at the candle-clad tables, speculate in whispers about their probable morals, and then go home and describe it all at each other's teas.

"Weird, simply weird, my dear." And, seeing smocks which cost their owners seventy-six cents, they copy them accurately at an expense of twenty-seven dollars, and wear them

BETTINA

holily and blandly in their boudoirs, to their husband's great disgust and their maid's amusement.

But it is not Upper Fifth Avenue and Riverside Drive alone that goes slumming. No Villager really is above it. They of Sheridan Square go just as eagerly on occasion to tea with a great lady, and criticize the butler in their hearts, and come home, and with two mattresses from Macy's and several yards of cretonne, copy an achievement of madame's interior decorator, for the floor of the studio.

And just as surely as madame boasts to her friends from Greenwich, Conn., about Greenwich Village, N. Y., and casually mentions dropping in at Polly's last Saturday night and going around afterward to see the studio of Pierre Peters, the artist,—“Such a clever young man,”—just so surely does Betty Barnes, one hundred and thirty something MacDougal Street, boast of her friend Nadine Yorowits, over their cigarettes, that she had tea yesterday at Mrs. ——'s on Riverside Drive.

Of course in the Village they hide the boast-

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ing motif better. They do everything better in the Village. The subtle, complex, highest achievement of civilization finds its expression there, more than anywhere else in the world. The Villagers do not tell you this, they are too modest. They only let you see it yourself from their conversation.

But the veneer of friendly intercourse which necessarily coats slumming, is cast aside by these two parts of New York when their political division is concerned. Here they are frankly foes, and there can be no trafficking with the enemy.

Someone down the march of ages once conceived the idea of mixing politics with ideals, and since then there has been, as less scrupulous persons might phrase it, the devil to pay. When people begin having ideals, something uncomfortable usually happens. While politics were politics, all was well, but now that politics are ideals, families split and hate each other, parents quarrel and children fight, brother is set against brother, and the uptown slummer and the merry Villager think of one another with contempt and scorn.

BETTINA

There is no hatred like the hatred between radical and conservative—unless it be the hatred between radical and radical—but that has nothing to do with Bettina.

Bettina Howard was a girl who had gone to boarding-school, at the correct distance up the Hudson, and had lived up to the ideals of her English teacher ever since. Bettina was of the height that finds dances in the West more enjoyable than in New York, for in New York there are always a certain proportion of short men. She was slender, with bones in her neck, and knobby elbows, but there was something about her—it was a vestige of charm like a smudge on her face. Everyone but she knew about it, and if she had guessed at its presence now, she would have wiped it off, stern and ashamed. For already she was on the verge of becoming emancipated. She was of that indeterminate race that is neither blonde nor brunette, and so, according to all the tables, may marry either. Her hair was only hair-color. It was a grief to her, for, like all girls except red-headed ones, she would have liked it to be red. She was a kindly girl, who sought

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to give joy to all, but she had a way of finding the most devious methods of doing it.

She was engaged to a proper person. Nothing is more tantalizing and elusive than being engaged to a proper person. It only serves to give one hints of how delicious the same sort of relationship would be with someone more exciting.

“Exciting” was Bettina’s favorite word, and, poor girl, she found little occasion to use it. When one has always lived at the correct number on Riverside Drive, and has no place but teas to meet one’s old friends and make new ones, life ceases notably to excite. She lived in a more unpretentious place now, for since her parents’ death had left her alone in the world, and unexpectedly penniless as well, she had supported herself teaching school. And there was no excitement in that.

But Bettina, being a woman, hoped on. She felt sure that she would only have to be good and gentle and unselfish and get up early in the morning after a dance and step bravely under the cold shower, without stopping to shiver, and all good things would come to her.

BETTINA

She is not the first; many people have lived and died in that belief.

But after two or three weeks of following the formula, she was distinctly bored. The Howards are a very old and autocratic family. They do not slum.

And besides, it was early Spring. One is always so apt to be bored in early Spring.

Bettina was being called upon by William Clark, her eminently proper fiancé, who had recently been admitted to the bar. It is a nice question whether the punishment of calls falls more heavily upon the sinner or the sinned against.

"Let us hope," said Bettina, after a wide pause, during which they both looked longingly out of the window, "that in heaven there is no calling or paying of calls."

William smiled indulgently. "Am I to understand you're not having a good time?"

"I've never had a good time in my life!" she broke out.

"Few do," murmured William.

"Oh, it's all right about you. You're from

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New England, and you get your thrills in denying yourself thrills. But all my ancestors came from Montana. I can't get drunk on self-denial. I'm not a Boston Bacchanal. I haven't it in me."

"I—ah—I wouldn't say we exactly get drunk on self-denial, Bettina," he remonstrated.

"Oh, yes, you do! A man with a New England conscience is like a man with a private supply of liquor in his own cellars. A secret tippler, or whatever it's called. He doesn't have to go out and drink at public bars. Of course I know there's no such thing as drinking any more. Didn't they make a law about it or something? But anyway, it's so convenient to be a New Englander and find hilarious excitement in constant battles between your better self and your brute nature, like a baseball series. It keeps you interested. It saves money too. You never have to go to the movies to be entertained."

"I should never go to the movies in any case, I hope," said William with disapproval in his tones.

BETTINA

Bettina looked at him a moment. "No, you wouldn't," she agreed despairingly.

"It's not that, though, really. It's not only a good time."

"But——" he asked leaning toward her and looking at her through his aristocratic nose glasses. He had the sort of thin, intellectual face to which nose glasses are the necessary finishing touch, like the cherry in a fruit lemonade. "But what is it you want?"

"Oh, I want all sorts of things—like freedom." She was so earnest that she left her stiff-backed chair and came and sat on the sofa quite near him. "Intellectual freedom, I mean. And progress."

"Hm—yes. Toward what?"

"Well, I hadn't thought." Her frank blue eyes looked out trustfully at him.

"I'd like," she said after a wistful pause, "to be at the center of things. Where new movements are born." She looked into his face for encouragement. "That sort of thing," she elaborated hopefully.

"Ah—yes," said Clark. "Yes."

She punched a yellow sofa cushion into

THE HUSBAND TEST

shape as he'd seen her do a hundred times, dug her elbow comfortably into it, leaned her head on her hand, looked into his eyes and spoke confidentially.

"It's a terrible thing to live among the dead," she said plaintively. "Reactionaries. People who are blind to the great things going on about us." She looked earnestly at him.

"Movements," she said.

"Ah, yes."

"There is so much to be done."

"I dare say."

She became impassioned. "I want to know life for myself, to see, and hear, and feel!"

"Well, I'm not sure that I should so much advise feeling," he interposed cautiously.

"I want it! I want it all!" said Bettina.

He looked at his hands interestedly, and at the rug.

"Life!" said Bettina. "I want to see life, real, pulsating, naked!"

"Yes, as far as life goes, I dare say it would be perfectly proper. It's only in art we object to the nude."

"Art," she repeated. And her eyes

BETTINA

sparkled. "To be with those who are the true devotees of art, who give their lives to her ——"

"Yes, yes."

"Those who bring the play spirit into art and life," she said enthusiastically.

He felt then that a suspicion he had entertained earlier in the conversation was confirmed.

"Bettina," he asked sadly, "have you been seeing an announcement of one of those Greenwich Village Balls?"

"Yes, I have."

"But ——"

"And I'm going."

He resigned himself. "I shall take you."

"That wouldn't be the same thing at all! You wouldn't let me dance with the interesting untidy ones."

"Certainly I shouldn't."

"And so I'm going by myself!"

"Bettina!"

"There's nothing to be said about it."

"There's one thing to be said." He was standing now, his shoulders firmly thrown back

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with the proper degree of stiffness. "You are my fiancée, and I shan't allow it."

Bettina stood up also. She slipped the ring dexterously from her finger and into his pocket and had backed out of reach before he could divine her purpose.

"I could never have married you anyway," she said. "You would smother my personality."

CHAPTER II

GOES TO A GREENWICH VILLAGE BALL

FOR a moment he looked viciously as if he would have enjoyed smothering it.

Bettina drew a perceptible sigh of relief. She was sampling the exhilarating brew of freedom.

"That's over," she said. "And it will be a long time before I ever get engaged again!"

He might have answered that it would be a long time before she did to him, but he thought of that just as the bus passed the Joan of Arc statue on his way home.

Bettina went to the dance. She was taken there by the cousin of a girl with whom she had gone to school, whose husband got the tickets through an artist he had known in the trenches. Everyone gets Greenwich Village ball tickets in that roundabout way. Why it is so, is not known.

THE HUSBAND TEST

Frantically on the last afternoon Bettina had searched for a costume. She had vaguely heard that the proper thing was considered to be the piano cover or a strip of batik, but she was not clever at these things.

After prowling about the costume shops near Forty-seventh Street and Broadway, she paid twelve dollars to rent for the night a prim Dutch thing, with lace cap and sabots. She didn't know what she would do with the sabots, but bore her box away in triumph.

At the door of Webster Hall they waited while the densely packed bread-line in front of them clamored for tickets.

Once in, she blinked at the riot of color. The dance was the annual Pagan Rout, this year one blaze of gold. All the costumes were golden, the walls were hung with gold, the ceilings ——

“Gorgeous, isn't it?” said an easy voice at her shoulder. She turned, and was surprised to find that it did not belong to the cousin, the husband or the relatives with whom she had exchanged opinions about the weather on the way.

A VILLAGE BALL

"Rather good effect. Better than last year, don't you think?" went on the voice, which was attached to a pirate.

"I don't know. This is my first," answered Bettina, looking round her lace ear-things at his black flapping-topped boots.

"Your first?" said the pirate joyously, and Bettina saw no more of her own party that evening.

After one dance, the pirate was gone, whisked away by a Greek dryad with yellow finger tips, and Bettina never saw him again. But at her side someone else was inveigling against Amy Howell's theory of the return in polyrhythmic prose. He was a sort of checker-board youth, done in black and white, but before they could dance, the crowd parted them. Then an Apollo-like gentleman as tall and perfect as a statue, without a word swung past, clutched her and swept her into the fox-trot that was raging about them.

She was bewildered, but waited for him to open the conversation, for she was not sure enough whether or not free verse was or was not too passé to be discussed.

THE HUSBAND TEST

But the perfect dancer said not a word. They circled the crowded room again and again. Then she discovered that he was kissing her hair. She was tall, but he was taller, and she would not have known, surrounded as she was by his shoulder, if she had not seen, in a mirror which they flashed past.

"To-morrow, at four at The Blue Mushroom," he said, breaking the silence casually.

"I beg your pardon?"

"To-morrow, at four at The Blue Mushroom," he repeated patiently.

"Yes, I heard." But what about it? she wanted to say, but refrained.

He danced on calmly.

She was puzzled, but suspected that perhaps the man was under the influence of some drug, heroin or one of those interesting things.

She became a bit alarmed, for as there were two bands relieving each other, and in the breath-taking half moment between dances he went on holding her and started the next with her calmly, she foresaw an evening spent in the arms of her dumb partner.

"A quiet evening at any rate," she thought,

A VILLAGE BALL

and then blushed for her descent into a lower depth than puns.

But just as she was resolving to shriek for help, the checker-board youth, appearing by a miracle, jerked her from the statue and whisked and pulled and pushed her through some dance of his own invention, telling her the particular scandal about anyone with whom they collided, in the loudest sort of tones.

Soon the evening resolved itself into a haze of color and one pair of perspiring hands after the other, one voice after another mixing gossip, friend, imagism, and compliments into a heady draught.

She grew interested in the enumerated qualities of vers libre and her eyes, and decided that she had heretofore overlooked possibilities in them both.

One found and lost people. It was like life, only speeded up.

After one of the features, a dance by Pan and nymphs, she saw the checker-board youth again. He had been sitting at the feet of two bobbed and eyebrowed girls with lovely shoul-

THE HUSBAND TEST

ders and ankles, but he had smiled over their heads at the Dutch maid against the wall.

“Dance this?” he said, as one of the two alternating bands swung into a new waltz.

“I came to dance,” she assented.

They floated out, lost themselves in the *mêlée*, struggled through, bumped a stout bare-footed gentleman and his eye-glassed partner, and smiled at each other delightedly. This time no one snatched either of them away, and since it was a waltz, they had time to talk.

“Live in the Village?” he asked.

“No,” said Bettina. She wished she could claim kinship with this brilliant, epigrammatic race. But she must be honest.

“Mentally I belong to about a hundred and tenth street,” she confessed.

He flashed her a smile. “But fundamentally—to the Village?”

She smiled too, with a trifle of acquiescence in her look, and in the blue eyes, not obscured from him by the curved lace flaps of her Dutch cap, the bit of wickedness she had learnt earlier in the evening to insert there.

A VILLAGE BALL

She looked at him appraisingly. "Paint? Write? Act?" she hazarded.

"With the Provincetown Players," he answered the last. "And for Harry Kemp, only he put me out last time because he's the only man in the cast allowed to forget his lines. Monopolist, with his views!"

"But what do you do beside?" she persisted.

A girl in red who was dancing past overheard. She leaned backward out of her partner's arms.

"What! Hasn't Temp showed you any of his poems yet?" she laughed, and was swept out of sight.

"Oh, do!" begged Bettina. "I've always wanted to meet a poet."

"You don't mean to say you don't know anyone who writes?" He led her to a corner of the room, where, finding all the benches occupied, he promptly sat down on the floor, and, pulling her down beside him, produced some crumpled papers from his sash.

"Absurd about costumes," he said. "No pockets."

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“Read it!” she commanded.

And, shouting to drown the frenzy of the negro band, he read it.

“How wonderful!” said Bettina, her eyes misted and big with awe. And in that moment he fell in love.

They danced again and again, changing partners now and then, and making appointments to meet. “At that pillar,” he had said the last time. “Down in the left hand corner,” where it seemed to Bettina when she went there to wait, everyone else had planned to meet also. The two had to fight their way through to each other, and missed the Russian band’s first bar.

“I thought you wouldn’t be able to find me,” she said.

“So did I,” he answered. “Would you have minded?”

“Yes,” confessed Bettina.

His face lighted up.

“You dance so well,” she finished.

The light went out.

She saw that she had said the wrong thing. She was much distressed.

A VILLAGE BALL

"I don't know how one talks down here," she explained.

"Thank heaven!" he answered, as he dug an elbow viciously into a stout lady in order to wriggle into the mass of dancers.

"You're so different," he said, after they had strugglingly circled the crowded hall.

"It's you who are different," she breathed, and they looked at each other soulfully.

Time-honored formula! After two people have found each other "different" there is no hope.

As they were caught in the spell wrought by their own rhythmic feet, he bent over her dazed face, and said lovely things in a hushed voice.

The evening galloped hilariously on. With every dance the two grew better acquainted. The dances with other men began to seem to Bettina mere interludes.

Finally, piloted by a perspiring partner, she found herself seated in the refreshment room at the next table to the checker-board youth.

He tilted his chair backward to be nearer the lace flap over her ear.

"Let's get out of this," he said.

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Bettina, seeing her iced lemonade approaching on a waiter's tray, had a mighty longing, but stifled it.

"But I'm thirsty," she allowed herself to say, as he pulled her along by the hand.

"Come on," said he. "I'll read you a poem." And in the remark and answer Bettina might have seen her whole possible future life outlined, if she had been wise.

"Let's sit up-stairs and watch," he said, pulling her toward the stairway.

He found her a chair and leaned against a pillar beside her. She rested her arms on the rail in the most picturesque pose she could muster, and gazed down at the dissolving picture. Color, gayety, joy! Ah, this was life!

"It's splendid to live like this," she looked at him enviously.

"The play spirit," said he.

She brightened. She had heard that before. She looked at his serious eyes.

"How wonderful it must be to be a poet!"

"It is," said he.

Neither spoke for a moment. They sur-

A VILLAGE BALL

rendered themselves to the silence, feeling it draw them closer.

Presently, "Shall I read you a poem now?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!"

He explored his sash again.

"There are no drowned men in her eyes,"

he began.

"Oh," she breathed ecstatically.

"It is a great poem," she said, when he had finished.

"Yes, it is," he answered earnestly. "But here is one in which I captured the mood even more completely." The reading went on and on. Her admiration grew.

"But nothing rhymes?" she suggested, rather bewilderedly.

"Oh, rhyme went out long ago! Why, free verse is so old that no one ever even fights about it now. It's taken for granted."

He folded up the last regretfully. Such a listener is not always to be had.

"Sometime," said he softly, "I may do one to you."

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“Oh!” Bettina clasped her hands. Her thoughts went scornfully back to William Clark. He had never written a poem to her. This, this was being alive, at last. How marvelous the world was! She suddenly felt very tender toward her mother, the cook, and the news-dealer at the corner of their block.

CHAPTER III

BETTINA PAYS FOR THE TAXI

How Nature twists all things to her need! Even poetry itself, she uses, as one more of the bits of cheese wherewith to bait the trap she sets for the unsuspecting feet of the man and maid as yet unattached.

The dance went on. The music roared about them, but they did not hear. They talked of life and death, the common subjects of gossip of the young.

He showed her his ambition, and she fed it, as she might have a pet dog he had displayed.

Finally he spoke in a hushed voice: "I could be the greatest poet in the world," he said, "if ——"

"If what?" Bettina breathed.

"If I had you."

There was a silence.

THE HUSBAND TEST

“ Oh, don’t you think you could, anyway? ” she asked, distressed.

But it appeared that he could not.

“ You make me feel things freshly again. I see the world with the eyes of a child! You make everything alive, because you are so alive yourself! ”

“ I’m very glad,” said Bettina, modestly.

“ As soon as I saw you —— ” he began.

“ I, too,” confessed Bettina.

They gazed at each other. Pierrots and blue-painted Egyptians jostled them, but they paid no heed.

“ To live near the springs of beauty always, to feel the rhythm of life,” said he.

“ Yes,” said Bettina. How right she had been to extricate herself from William’s engagement ring. Why, William had no conception of things like this. She felt beauty laving her like a pool in which one bathed, making her a part of it. She seemed to breathe in the atmosphere of poetry. She was sure that she felt the rhythm of life. It was a delicious feeling, something like being saved by an evangelist at camp-meeting.

BETTINA PAYS THE TAXI

"If we hadn't met," said the poet, awed.

Her eyes grew dark with the horror of it.

"You are the loveliest thing," he began.

"Hadn't we better dance?" she asked in alarm.

"Of course we'd better. Shall we?"

"Well," said Bettina, with the innocent big eyes of girlhood, "*I am* a little tired."

He looked around. Then he guided her into the refreshment room. The party nearest them were noisily receiving their orders.

"Dearest," he said.

"You mustn't," said Bettina. "But oh, do!"

"You adorable thing!"

"Don't!" she cried then. "I like your saying these things, but I don't think you should."

"But I'm serious. Don't you see that I mean it?"

"Mean what?" she asked innocently.

"That I'm madly in love with you."

"Oh!"

"But don't you like me?"

"Oh, yes."

THE HUSBAND TEST

“ I need you, your inspiration, you! Marry me!—Will you? ”

“ But I thought—Greenwich Village—free love ——” she was embarrassed.

“ Oh, we’ve outgrown all that,” he said. “ It was only a pose. The individual, trying to escape an old convention, found himself more firmly chained by a new.”

“ Oh,” said she, uncomprehending, but polite.

“ Then you will? ”

She looked into his anxious eyes, and felt the rhythm of life more strongly than ever.

“ Yes,” she said faintly.

He kissed her without even looking round.

She liked the kiss. It had a quality quite unlike one of William Clark’s. This was like drinking from a mountain spring, while the other was like drinking from a teacup.

He drew her half behind the pillar, where they were sheltered by the back of a fat man. He held her closely to him. She laid her head on his shoulder. This, this, after all, was what she had wanted. This was the goal for which her restlessness had bade her blindly set out.

BETTINA PAYS THE TAXI

And she had won it! All that she had wanted would be hers.

She looked up into his eyes. "How exciting it will be," she whispered, "to be married to a radical!"

The rest of the dance passed like a parade which one is crowded back from seeing. They were pushed and elbowed away from the consciousness of it by the new and delicious emotions which they could re-manufacture endlessly, simply by looking at each other.

At last the orchestra, cruelly dexterous, swung from the waltz they were playing into "Home, Sweet Home." Neither the orchestra nor the dancers reflected that it was a queer tune to be played at an all-night Greenwich Village masquerade, for a horde of dancers who had no homes.

As its muted notes swept over the room, dancers tightened their clasps about each other's necks, girls' heads dropped to their partners' shoulders, and sleepy lips met sleepy lips in the frankest of kisses.

Bettina and he clutched each other in terror. Was it over, then?

THE HUSBAND TEST

"But we'll have all our lives together," he whispered in tender comfort.

Yes, she knew. But to cease touching him, to cease feeling his touch, when the music stopped, was like a death to her.

She checked out her wraps, changed her shoes and costume in a dressing-room crowded with unseen, sleepy, powder-puffing women, her mind in a sweet confusion.

She slipped down the stairs to find him waiting for her.

"Why, it's light!" she cried as they shivered at the first touch of the morning air.

"Of course—it's nine o'clock," he laughed. "Breakfast at Polly's?"

"No, I think I'd better just go home. I'm sleepy, and besides I want to be alone—to remember you."

A lone taxi hove in sight, and the huddled crowd on the steps strove for it like cannibals for one insufficient missionary.

"Flag the next," she implored.

They stowed themselves sleepily into the next.

As it rolled noiselessly along Fifth Avenue,

BETTINA PAYS THE TAXI

toward her home, she thrilled at the thought of all that had passed since she left it. Her fate had been met, her future was arranged, forever.

"Good-night," she whispered, turning for a kiss just before the taxicab stopped.

"Good-morning!" he whispered back as he kissed her, and they laughed out happily, each certain that no one in the world before had ever felt quite like this.

"But you'll have to pay for the taxi," said her suitor, in an undertone. "I haven't a cent."

If she could have seen exactly the far-reaching implications of this beginning! If she could have looked ahead!

But Bettina, thinking no evil, paid for the taxi.

CHAPTER IV

“IT WILL BE SO EXCITING TO MARRY A RADICAL”

AND the next morning Bettina 'phoned William Clark, apologized very prettily, made up the quarrel, and became reëngaged to him.

She had learned a great many things at the ball the night before—not all from “Temp,” and she was putting some of them into practice.

Next she 'phoned her two most intimate girl friends, bribing them with a promise of news, and when they came, theorized maddeningly before she told them, and led them into discussions which she fondly hoped were preparing their minds for what she had to say.

Although it was, decoratively, modern enough, there was nothing in Bettina's bachelor apartment that might shock one's mother, except the conversation.

Ruth knew, no matter how primly it started, what the conversation was apt to grow into,

SO EXCITING—A RADICAL

since Bettina had become restless. She knew, and yet she always came.

“Ruth is one of those womanly women,” Bettina said, “and you can’t keep them away from *any* place where they think they’re likely to get a man, a bargain, or a shock.”

Bettina was not a womanly woman, at least, not now. She considered herself utterly free from feminine charm. She was resolved no longer to do her hair in papers. She would strive to put the wavy undulations into her brain instead. One needed to exert oneself far less for that, after all.

She had never been interested in the vote, even when it was out of reach. It was in their emotional life that women needed to be free, she asserted this afternoon. “The slavery of marriage!” she said glowingly. Not that she had anything against marriage. No girl has. She did not object to women being in cages, only she wanted them to have an opportunity to look leisurely about among the cages, and choose the one they would later rage against least, instead of popping into the first whose door happened to open as they passed by.

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Her blue eyes were wide and interested, and she sat up stiffly against the yellow cushions on her black couch.

Ruth and Nadine and she had gone to boarding-school together, and, after the manner of girls who have discussed the world of school in kimonos and long braids, they still met desultorily to discuss the ways of the not so unlike world outside school.

The three were very different. What friends aren't? Ruth was all that her grandmother could wish. Nadine was emphatically not. Bettina was tentatively feeling about life, and had not yet decided what to be.

Ruth was a small, precise person, "The sort that's always dutiful, and self-sacrificing, and catty," Bettina said. But one has to have a certain number of women friends of that type, she realized. They so abound.

Nadine was a new woman, almost too new. One hesitated about her, as one hesitates about using a very new casserole, and finally chooses the old chipped familiar one. Nadine had been married and divorced; and greatly changed, all at once, embittered and made wise and tol-

SO EXCITING—A RADICAL

erant by one of the happenings, Bettina could never be quite sure whether it was the marriage or the divorce.

One forgot those things about Nadine, however. Her allure was so obviously that belonging to girlhood and not to maturity. She was a good friend, one to count upon, and Bettina had learned enough about girls in boarding-school to know how rare is a real girl friend.

Almost every woman is a good pal to almost any man. No woman nowadays is so stupid as not to know how well it pays. But hardly one is quite self-sacrificing enough to deny herself the civilized, complex, subtle pleasure to be derived from having a dear woman friend always as conveniently by as the cushion on her dressing-table, and for the same purpose.

Nadine never stuck pins into Bettina. She was one of the few women who have enough sex attraction to be able with impunity to prick men's vanity instead of women's.

Nadine was tall and dark, scornful of eyes and tone, quietly enjoying life's irony as it exhibited itself in the experiences of her friends.

They were perfect friends to have. Bettina

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knew that Nadine would not steal any of her suitors, and that Ruth could not. Her affection for them both was sincere.

The three were thoroughly enjoying themselves this afternoon. They were talking about life. It is a subject that is increasingly engrossing women. It bids fair soon to be more popular than ruffles. With Bettina it was already. She was madly interested in life. She had only just discovered it as a subject for conversation. So many people have. In fact, with her the discovery was not yet twenty-four hours old.

Nadine was a trifle weary of life, and Ruth thought being alive at all somewhat indecorous, but to Bettina it was a new toy which she intended to seize and wind up at once. If its mechanism was somewhat difficult, she was quite confident that she could make it work. She only wondered how she could have played with other things contentedly for so long.

And the most fascinating problem of all was marriage. It would be, because it is the hardest of all to get the right answer to. If anyone ever does get the right answer. Nadine

SO EXCITING—A RADICAL

thought no one did, and that there wasn't any answer, anyway, and Bettina was too kind and Ruth too unintelligent to reflect aloud that it was just because Nadine had become mixed in her figures half-way through, herself.

"Women always marry the wrong man," stated Nadine, with conviction. "It's a basic axiom, upon which all life is built."

"Not modern women," objected Bettina. "The old-fashioned women, who took what they were given—yes. But not feminists."

"No matter how people play the game of marriage, they always lose," Nadine answered gloomily.

"That's because they don't apply modern methods," Bettina spoke excitedly. "If they would only bring the scientific spirit to the study of marriage, and not 'go it blind.'"

"But what really do you mean they should do?" interrupted Ruth impatiently. Ruth, being the sort of girl who is intended by nature only for a good wife and mother, was always impatient when anyone used big words.

"Well, I'm tired of girls going meekly up to the altar and taking a chance on a man,

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as we would on a silver bonbon dish at a church fair. That's what marriage is, anyway, just a church fair, and the women keep on coming to buy, though they know no woman yet has ever got her money's worth."

"I don't think you should talk that way, Bettina," said Ruth, making her usual dignified objection, which had no effect, but which quite absolved her from any blame for whatever Bettina might later proceed to say.

But Bettina said nothing more original than, "Women always get the worst of it."

"I did," said Nadine laconically.

Bettina patted her hand. "I wasn't thinking of you. All women do. I expect to, myself. And that's why I wouldn't play by the old rules, if I ever did play."

"No?" Nadine leaned over to select another bonbon. She took the last tinsel—unwrapped it. Nadine was always indulgent to herself in the matter of bonbons. It was only in the big things of life that she was capable of self-sacrifice.

"I shall act with logic and reason," Bettina continued.

SO EXCITING—A RADICAL

"Oh, Bettina!" cried Ruth. "I knew you'd do something unladylike!"

"I'm not going into it blindly, as every other nice woman does. It's the method that's wrong. We can't know what a man's like until it's too late to exchange him. I intend to know."

"And if you knew, you think it would make a difference?" Nadine's tone was only pleasantly conversational. "Why, if women did test men, they wouldn't abide by the test anyway."

"I would."

"Yes?" politely.

"Perhaps I'll show you some day."

"Do," invited Nadine cordially.

"You think I'm just talking, and that it will never go beyond that!"

"I hope it will not," from Ruth promptly.

"Women aren't so sentimental and blind and illogical as you seem to think, Nadine!"

"No?"

"Oh, I should like to show you!"

"How?" asked Ruth practically.

"Well, I know what girls should start do-

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ing, but they never will, I suppose. Girls like us, I mean—but I intend to.”

“What?” asked the curious Ruth.

There was a portentous silence in the blue and yellow apartment. Bettina sat up straighter on the black couch. “Did you ever hear of trial marriage?”

“No,” said Ruth hastily, with rigid primness.

“Then,” said Bettina firmly, “it’s time you did.”

“Quite,” added Nadine, amused. “But, Bettina, would you, yourself, go in for trial marriage?”

“Yes,” said Bettina, with the holy look of one about to suffer martyrdom.

CHAPTER V

BETTINA AND THE ACID TEST

RUTH was the first to recover from the blow. She did so by assuming that there had been no blow.

"Bettina, be practical," she suggested. She swept away these wild theories as something that had no more to do with actual life than poetry had, or Sunday thoughts. She was always more interested in the concrete than in abstract suppositions, however shocking.

"You said," she went on plaintively, "you were engaged. And I cut a date with my dressmaker to hear what he looks like. And now you give us a lecture on ethics or something. I'm sure I don't know what!"

"I am engaged," announced Bettina.

"No!"

"Really?"

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"Well," answered Bettina, "before I said 'yes' or 'no' finally, of course I said 'yes' at first—one always does ——"

"Who is he?" cried Ruth.

"They," corrected Bettina calmly.

"They!"

"Only two," Bettina hastened to reassure them.

"Only two," murmured Nadine. "How old-fashioned!"

Ruth looked at her with shocked eyes. "Oh, Bettina! Isn't it against the law to be engaged to two men at once?"

"I shouldn't wonder. Laws are so absurd. I am thinking of looking into anarchism. One hears there are any number of interesting Russians at the Ferrar School, with curly hair—a lovely blue-black."

"But the two?"

"One's William Clark. I've been engaged to him for ages, and I'd have told you long ago, if either of you'd been in town. You know I never write letters. He's a lawyer."

"A lawyer," repeated Ruth with approval.

"The other's a poet."

THE ACID TEST

"A poet!" repeated Ruth, not with approval.

"Where did you meet him?" Nadine was enjoying the poet.

"At Webster Hall. Where does one meet them?"

"A Greenwich Village masquerade?" asked Nadine.

"Yes. I'd never been before, so I suppose it rather went to my head."

"I should judge so," interposed Nadine drily.

"Bettina, you weren't at a Village Ball?" Ruth demanded, aghast.

"Yes."

"Were the costumes ——" Ruth, being a womanly woman, was obliged to hesitate.

"Yes, they were," admitted Bettina bluntly. "But the floor and music were quite all right. And everyone had a lovely time, except the barefooted people who happened to be dancing with pirates or cowboys or something that wore boots."

"How can you talk about boots, when your future's at stake? Tell us about the poet!"

THE HUSBAND TEST

"I can't think what possessed him to ask me," confessed Bettina in a puzzled tone.

"Had he been drinking?" inquired Ruth. "For it's done somehow, even now, one hears."

"There's no one so sarcastic about proposals as the girl who never gets them," observed Bettina, with truth, but with bitterness as well.

"Oh, go on," Nadine waved off the personal warfare impatiently.

"Well," said Bettina, "you know what those Greenwich Village Balls are like. Up-towners go to them as grown-ups go to the circus, making apologies all the time, and pretending they don't want to, when everyone knows they wouldn't stay away for worlds. And the Villagers go because it doesn't cost anything, because they know someone on the committee and can get tickets for nothing, and because they can use the studio rug for a costume. It was a lovely ball. And all the proper men I know were there, but all the nice improper ones, artists and poets and the people that sit in the basement at the Brevoort instead of up-stairs, were there too, and I had to pretend not to know the proper men so as not to

THE ACID TEST

shock the poets, and not to know the poets, so as not to shock the nice men. It's very difficult attending a Village Ball!"

"But the proposal!" interrupted Ruth.

"Oh, yes! It was so different from the kind one gets uptown. Now when William did it, he led me up to it by talking in a low tone about his mother. From that it was only a step to asking me to marry him. I think it's taking such an advantage of us, don't you, for a man to tell one about his dead mother? It makes it so difficult not to marry him."

"Marrying him," interposed Nadine, grimly, "would have more difficulties if she were alive."

"Yes, I've always been afraid of mothers-in-law," agreed Ruth. "But now, that voting and things are taking their attention, it's lovely for brides."

"Betty, go on! Did you say yes?"

"Of course. One always says yes, first. It isn't wicked then, to let him kiss you, because you're engaged. And then you go home and write him a note on pink stationery and tell him it can never be. But you've had the kiss."

THE HUSBAND TEST

"Bettina, how *can* you?" cried Ruth in shocked tones, but to herself she reflected, "I never thought of that."

"Ah, so he kissed you," said Nadine.

"Yes, he did. It was in a corner, and someone was doing a dance with dyed scarfs and bare feet and those Greek things, so no one saw."

"What did it feel like?" asked Ruth.

"Not so bad as one would have thought. He must have gone to a co-educational college."

"And so you're going to marry him?" inquired Nadine drily.

"Oh, I didn't have time to decide that! You know I always wear peacock blues and I don't know yet how his hair goes with them. There are so many things to be thought of. One shouldn't enter into these things lightly."

"Is he a good poet?" Nadine was willing to waive the discussing of the solemnity of marriage.

"A wonderful one! He never once stepped on my feet."

"But what's his name?" insisted Ruth.

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"Why, I don't think I heard his last name. His first name's Arthur. Or Egbert. Or something like that. I'll ask him to-day. Remind me, will you, dear?"

"You don't know his name? But—you don't mean you'd just been introduced to him when he proposed!" Ruth was more horrified than ever.

"Oh, no."

"Oh," breathed Ruth, relieved.

"We weren't introduced at all."

"They call him 'Temp'—it's a nickname, short for 'Temperament,'" Betty explained, still dreamily.

"Humph!" ejaculated Nadine.

"Oh, I suppose they did it to make fun of him," confessed Betty calmly, "but I don't care. I think it's romantic."

"This is growing interesting." Nadine took another chocolate, and settled herself more comfortably.

"We just saw each other. And we both were rather good-looking, so we smiled, and he came over, and we danced quite often. And afterward, he asked me to marry him."

THE HUSBAND TEST

“What was his idea?”

“He said he’d be a great poet anyway, but if I would marry him and inspire him, he’d be the greatest poet in America. And he said, the way things looked now, it was really one’s duty to do what one could to further the cause of American literature.”

“But was that why he wanted you to marry him?”

“Well, and he liked the way my mouth went when I laughed, he said. And so I said I’d marry him. And he kissed me in the opposite corner of the room, while they were having a pageant. He did it much better than William used to.”

“But which *are* you going to marry?”

“That’s what I had you come for, to explain.”

“Well?”

“It’s just as I said, I don’t know enough about either of them.”

“You might, if you waited a bit,” Nadine advised mildly.

“No, I wouldn’t. After all, what more does a woman know after she’s gone to dinner with

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him every other evening for a year, about a man? Nothing."

"I shouldn't wonder if you're right," answered Nadine wearily.

"I am."

"But what are you going to do about it?"

"I didn't sleep all night," confessed Bettina. "You see, I'd broken with William—that's the lawyer. And then I'd promised Temp. But the more I thought of Temp, the more good qualities I remembered about William, and the more I thought of William, the more clearly I could hear Temp's voice—saying things." Bettina's eyes became dreamy. "And so I knew that the only way to be really sure, forever and ever, was to test them both."

"But, Betty, some other test——" Ruth was scandalized.

"Yes," said Bettina, contemptuously, "like seeing which can make a million dollars first."

"But money does count. And you'll find it out some day," vengefully.

"I wouldn't need to test them for that. I know which could make a million dollars first," said Bettina gloomily.

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"But you want to know which will make you happiest?"

"Unhappiest," corrected Betty briefly. "I prefer to find which will, before he's had a chance to do it for life."

"Have they agreed to—take turns at being tried?" Nadine was finding the affair increasingly entertaining.

Betty brightened. "I haven't told them yet," she confessed, and then explained, cheerfully. "That's why you're here. I've asked them to call this morning for their answers. They should be here now. You'll help me?"

"Betty, give it up!" wailed Ruth. "You really won't try marrying each?"

"For a month," said Bettina firmly. "And then really marry the one that proves most congenial. It's the only moral and eugenic thing to do—besides being the most interesting."

"If you propose any such thing to them," warned Ruth, "you'll shock them."

"You can't shock a man," said Betty, gloomily.

"Did you tell William you were engaged to Temp?"

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"No," confessed Betty, rather shamefaced. Then she brightened. "But I will when he comes. I believe," she announced virtuously, "in being absolutely honest."

"Yes," agreed Ruth, seeing no evil, "a girl should be perfectly aboveboard with men."

"Well," said Betty, judiciously, "not too awfully aboveboard, if you ask me! A man's just like a mule. If you use only gentleness and sweetness and loving kindness he'll never notice your existence."

"They should be here now, shouldn't they?" asked Ruth, glancing too casually into the mirror opposite her chair, and making dabs at her hair delicately.

"Yes."

Ruth dexterously hid her handkerchief in her sleeve, but not so dexterously that Betty did not see. Then she proceeded to search the floor anxiously for it.

"I believe I've left my handkerchief in your room, Betty," she said with a vexatious laugh at her own carelessness. "I'll run up and get it."

Bettina and Nadine exchanged glances.

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"Gone to primp," said the hostess briefly.

"It's those sweet, retiring, old-fashioned girls who make the maddest clutch after anything masculine. All this new talk about efficiency is nothing. They're the most diabolically efficient thing the world has ever produced."

Nadine smiled. Bettina went on passionately. "It's they who make our task so hard. It never occurs to them to try a man out first. They're a scourge to humanity. Every woman born to be a door-mat ought to be killed at birth."

Ruth's step was heard, and Bettina stopped abruptly.

"I found it just in front of the mirror," said Ruth.

"I'll warrant you did," answered Betty grimly.

"Which is to call first?" asked Nadine, in an effort to promote peace.

"William."

"They'll never consent!" Ruth insisted.
"Especially the lawyer."

Nadine looked at Betty. "I think," she said

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tentatively, "you *would* have been wiser to have had the poet first."

Some instinct, or vision, or clarifying of ideas having no connection with their talk, suddenly gave Betty a realization of what she had been on the verge of proposing.

"I can't do it!" she cried out. "I'll not say a word to them! Perhaps they won't come."

A sharp ring of the door-bell startled them. The three sat silent, stricken.

After a pause, Hilary, the maid, entered.

"A gentleman to see you, Miss Bettina."

Betty turned a stricken gaze toward her. Then she recovered.

"Perhaps it's someone else," she suggested. "What does he look like?"

"Not like anyone who ever came here before, Miss."

Betty wilted. "It's the poet. They always look like that!"

At that instant there came a second loud peal at the door.

"*Both* of them!" groaned Bettina.

CHAPTER VI

“WELL,” SAID BETTINA, “I WAS THINKING OF
A MONTH ”

THE inspiration that rises in the soul to meet a crisis came to Betty.

“Tell them I’m out,” she whispered.

“I’ve already told the first one you’re in. You said ——”

“Make them wait,” she groaned, remembering. She must gain time.

The maid was about to leave the room, when her mistress looked sharply at her, and stopped her with a gesture.

“Why, Hilary, you’ve been crying. What’s the matter?”

“Nothing, Miss Bettina.”

Betty gazed doubtfully at her, but since her own troubles, for the moment, seemed enough, was tempted to allow her to go without further comment. Still, that she was doing her duty in

WELL—A MONTH

a big cause, should not interfere with her duty in lesser things; so she said severely:

“Are you busy just now?”

Hilary was.

“Well, as soon as you’re through, come directly in to me. Do you hear?” giving her a good-humored shake.

The maid promised and went out hastily.

“I’ve undertaken Hilary’s education in modern movements. I see that she reads the *New Republic* every week, and I’ve explained to her what socialism is.”

“Admirable,” praised Nadine; the irony in her voice, broad as it was, was quite lost on Betty.

“They’re probably sitting on opposite chairs in there, glaring at each other,” giggled Bettina. “Well, let them glare!”

“But you’ll have to see them sometime,” Nadine pointed out, impatiently.

“Yes,” Ruth urged, alert.

Bettina reached out patiently and rang for Hilary. “Show them in,” she whispered.

The two callers entered at the same moment, ushered in by Hilary.

THE HUSBAND TEST

The lawyer was too correctly dressed, but Temp had curly hair, so it really didn't matter what he wore. As a matter of fact, it was a corduroy suit that looked as if he'd slept in it—as, indeed, he had. Both men started forward, got in each other's way, and glared beligerently.

"Oh," groaned Bettina, and shut her eyes.

"Miss Howard," said Mr. Clark.

"Betty," said the poet, and in these two exclamations they showed the difference in their methods of attack.

"Is anything the matter?" they asked simultaneously.

"Water," breathed Betty faintly.

Hilary went out quickly.

"She isn't feeling very well to-day," explained Nadine easily. "A little excited——" her voice trailed off.

"I know, I know," answered Temp quickly. He was well aware of the cause of her excitement.

Unfortunately William Clark was convinced that he also was.

"I understand," he said meltingly.

WELL—A MONTH

Betty groaned again.

“Perhaps the corner drug store ——” Mr. Clark was already turning toward the door.

Hilary, hurrying in with the glass of water, almost upset him.

“Oh, no,” said Ruth, taking the glass, and as she crossed to Bettina, giving the lawyer a gentle, womanly smile. “You’re so kind.” Then she knelt becomingly, and pressed the water to Bettina’s lips.

“I’m quite all right now,” whispered Betty bravely. “It was just a—shock.”

Temp glared at his rival. “Of course,” said he.

The lawyer glared witheringly back.

“I quite understand,” said he.

Ruth, still kneeling, addressed her friend in the natural, sweet-toned voice she used only when men were present.

“Are you sure you’re all right, now, dear?”

Bettina’s voice came, still faint. “I think perhaps a little tea—Nadine, will you ring?”

Nadine rang, and at Hilary’s entrance spoke about the tea.

In the meantime Ruth was bustling about,

THE HUSBAND TEST

helping Bettina from the armchair into which she had sunk, making her lie down on the couch and tucking Nadine's best party scarf over her feet.

The two callers still glared.

"If you'd all not mind leaving me alone for a minute?" Betty closed her eyes and lay listless. "You can introduce each other," she remembered her duty as hostess.

"Quite the best thing," said Mr. Clark. "We'll go out and talk together a bit."

"Yes. Let's," answered Ruth, with a melting glance.

They turned to leave.

As they all passed her, the supine Betty suddenly shot out a hand and clutched Nadine's arm with a vicious grip. Nadine suppressed a cry, and stopped. The others went on. Betty still lay like one dead.

"They're gone," Nadine whispered, stooping.

Betty sat up with the suddenness of an apparition. Her languid voice changed to one of cool command. With a quick glance at the door she said tensely: "Send the poet in to me.

WELL—A MONTH

Keep the others. When Temp goes out, send the lawyer."

Nadine raised her hand in a salute and followed the others with a grin. Betty watched her out, sitting up, tense and dynamic. Then, as the door closed, sank back on the couch, and closed her eyes. Suddenly she came alive again, readjusted the couch cover more effectively, and resumed her pose.

Temp entered softly. "You adorable thing!" he breathed.

Suddenly forgetting her rôle, she sat up, tossing the scarf unceremoniously into space.

"Temp!"

"Are you going to say 'yes' or 'no'?"

"Well, you see ——"

"Because it really doesn't matter! You'll love me anyway, in the end!"

"Oh, Temp!" her voice became mellow and tender, exquisitely yielding.

"Most women do!" he finished cheerfully.

Bettina was shocked. She walked with dignity over toward the window, and looked out interestedly.

THE HUSBAND TEST

"But they don't count," he pleaded. "Nothing will ever count any more, but you."

She turned back forgivingly.

Temp ran his fingers through his poetic hair. His voice was fervent, but honest. "If you would marry me I'd cover the paths of the world with flowers for your feet."

"How exciting," said Bettina placidly coming closer, clasping her hands.

"I would build a wall with my arms to protect you from the world's hurts. No worry should ever touch your pure white brow." Moving closer, he tried to kiss her pure white brow.

She evaded him adroitly, but did not wholly discourage him. "That would be nice," she said.

"My heart would break if you refused me. —Do you mean to refuse me?"

"Well, not exactly that."

"You accept me?" he cried, transported.

"Well, not exactly *that*."

"I will make your life one round of joy. Will you let me take care of you forever?"

WELL—A MONTH

Forever! Forever!" with ecstasy he repeated.

"Well," she said judicially, "I was thinking of a month."

CHAPTER VII

FOR THE GOOD OF THE RACE

"AH—I beg your pardon?" he was utterly taken aback.

Bettina considered her manner of attack.

"You've heard about trial marriage?"

"I live in Greenwich Village," he answered sadly.

"Oh, yes, they invented it, didn't they? Although I should have said that Paris and Helen thought of it first. At any rate, I've decided that it is the sensible, scientific thing, in fact, that it's the only moral thing. I consider it my duty to my grandchildren."

"Your grandchildren!" Temp looked around the room in startled fashion, as if he expected to see them lurking about.

"All my descendents," she answered decidedly. "In fact, the race."

"Oh, yes, yes. Quite so."

GOOD OF THE RACE

"You don't object?"

"Object? Why should I?" he said indignantly. "Certainly not."

"Then you do approve of doing it."

"Yes, indeed," he answered heartily, even enthusiastically.

She was immeasurably relieved. "You don't think it in the least—improper?"

"Anyone who thought it improper would be a fool!"

—"Or a bit rash?"

"Not at all." His tones were emphatic.

"Then that's settled," she sighed, more relieved than ever.

"You dear! How wonderful for a woman to decide a momentous thing like that so suddenly!"

"Well, not exactly suddenly," Bettina answered modestly. "I've been thinking about it, off and on, ever since last evening."

"But you will really do it?" it was he now who was anxious.

"Oh, yes."

"You have splendid courage!" his eyes admired her courage.

THE HUSBAND TEST

"That wasn't what Ruth said," Betty remembered, doubtfully.

His whole pose was radiant with idealism. "Of course you will be criticized. Little minds will try to hinder you. But don't let anyone dissuade you! Don't listen to what *anyone* says!"

"I won't!" cried Betty, catching his enthusiasm.

"Be brave!"

"I will!"

"My darling!" his voice was tender.

"I knew you'd understand, and see that it is necessary."

"I do! It is!"

"You're certain that I ought to do it?"

"Certain."

"I'm so glad. Because now you can help me persuade the others. I'm afraid that they don't really quite understand. The girls thought it rash, I gathered."

"I shall explain. I shall tell them that it is an imperative need of your nature."

"Oh, thank you so much," she said with sincerity.

GOOD OF THE RACE

“Not at all. I know what a woman’s nature is.”

“I’m so glad,” she answered simply. “I’ve often been a little worried about it myself.”

“Whatever your heart commands you, you may safely do.”

“I’m relieved to hear that. You’ll tell them that too?” she asked, gratefully, but cannily.

“Yes, child. You may trust it to me,” he promised gently.

She broke in quietly, “I think, Temp dear, if you left me alone to collect my thoughts a bit before they come in ——”

“Yes, yes, child. You need to be alone.” He kissed her hand, which she extended somewhat absent-mindedly, and tiptoed out.

A moment after, William Clark entered, carefully closing the door behind him.

“Miss Nadine said she thought I might see you for just a moment, now that you’ve been alone and rested. Do you feel better?”

“Oh, so much better, Mr. Clark—William.”

“I can’t talk of anything else,” he said simply. “Is it to be ‘yes’ or ‘no’?”

THE HUSBAND TEST

Bettina beamed at him. "I don't know. But I've thought of a lovely method of finding out."

"I beg your pardon."

She explained in brisk tones. "You see a girl's heart is such a frightened, uncertain thing, Mr. Clark—William."

"I'm sure it is."

"It's so difficult to tell what we really want. —At any rate, it's so difficult to tell other people."

"I quite see it."

"That is, other people beside you."

"Precisely."

"There, I knew you wouldn't disapprove," she purred.

"Of what?"

Her hesitation was scarcely perceptible. "Have you heard of trial marriage?"

"Yes," said he sadly, "but I was hoping that *you* hadn't."

"I never had until lately," she answered brightly. "Isn't it stupendous the number of interesting things that are kept from nice women? It's so much easier to make conversa-

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tion at one's dinner parties now that all these things are coming out."

"But you're not going to make conversation of this, are you?" He leaned forward in his chair, alarmed.

"No. I'm going to make use of it."

"Miss Howard! Betty!" he cried, springing up in agitation.

"I thought you'd be interested." Her blue eyes looked at him reproachfully.

Sitting down again, he drew his chair closer to dissuade her.

"I don't like to marry a man until I've found out what he's really like," she interrupted.

"But you'd never marry him then," he objected in honest distress. "Me, I mean."

Betty looked downcast, but brightened. "But there are other men. There must be quite hundreds. One sees them on the street when one goes shopping," she returned confidently.

"Still, *no* woman can test them all. She'd spend her whole life doing it."

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"But what a way to spend one's life!" she clasped her hands in delight.

"I hope you aren't serious," he commented stiffly.

"Trial marriage? But I assure you," she said earnestly, "it really isn't awful at all. I know a girl who did it, and she said it was perfectly entrancing. They experimented for six months, and they proved to be so happy that they married—but after that they were never happy again," she was forced to admit the truth.

"My dear Miss Howard—Betty. I can't approve of your knowing such people. No real man would do such a thing."

"Wouldn't *you*?"

"Certainly not."

"No," she said, kindly but thoughtfully, "you probably wouldn't. I dare say it takes courage."

"I have courage, I hope," he said coldly.

"Oh, I hope so too!" she brightened.

"But not that kind." He withered her hopes.

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"What kind is it?" she asked, with real interest.

He chose to ignore her question. "You must put your foolish project out of your mind. It is wrong. And besides, what would your girl friends think?"

"They'd hate me."

"Exactly," he said with satisfaction.

"Because I was having such an entrancing time!" she finished.

He ignored her flippancy. "Promise me you won't mention it again!"

"Then you'll not be trial-married to me?" she asked mournfully.

"No!" said he, rising and stalking about, like the hero he was.

"It's only for a month," she pleaded.

"For a month is quite as bad as permanently," he pronounced.

Her face cleared. "Oh, would you do it permanently?"

"Certainly not," coldly. "*Will you marry me?*" he had the air of one who asks a question for positively the last time.

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"You're willing to take a chance on me?" she said plaintively.

"Yes, I am. Then why shouldn't you be?"

"But you see a man isn't taking much of a chance on any woman. He knows what she is like anyway. We show so. Now, men don't. One never knows what they're like by looking. Especially lawyers. You're trained to deceive. How I should love to hear of a man marrying a woman lawyer," she gloated. "But have you ever heard of one? You see, they know better."

He paid no attention to her tirade. He was traveling with the discomfort common to travelers, in his own train of thought.

"You'll give it up," he announced masterfully.

"And marry you blind? Certainly I shan't. What with the Pure Food laws and having one's own scales in the kitchen, women to-day are demanding to learn what they're getting. And even if you don't, I think husbands are vastly more important than what percentage of coloring matter there is in baking powder and how many pounds there are in beefsteak."

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"Other women take a chance."

"So I understand," drily.

"But if you'd just be logical," he pleaded hopelessly.

"You've no idea how it detracts from one's looks. Haven't you ever noticed the girls at co-educational colleges?"

"Looks aren't everything," he said gloomily.

"No." She gazed across into the mirror and patted her hair. "But they're nearly everything, don't you think?"

"Betty! If I could only prove to you you're wrong!" She quite understood he did not mean about looks.

"Yes," she answered, with sympathy and respect. "If anyone could prove right wrong, I'm sure *you* could."

He groaned.

"Then you won't do it," she summed it up.

"Oh, I'll do it," he surrendered, irritably. "Anything to get you, anything!" he said, still half groaning, but determined, distasteful as the method might be, to win.

At his words she glowed, suddenly a radiant,

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triumphant being. "Then everything's all right now. Let's tell them."

"Good gracious!" he clutched at her arm, but she had already thrown the door open, and the rest trooped in.

"I've—I've made a decision," Bettina announced, her eyes very grave and holy, as the girls placed themselves picturesquely against her cushions, and the men seated awkwardly and inartistically in the background. "And I want to tell you all about it at once."

Temp watched Bettina with a gaze triumphant, bland, and self-congratulatory.

So did William Clark.

Each felt that she was about to do a very fine, brave thing and that he must help her carry it through. And each glowed with a masculine vanity quite unsuspected by his heroic self.

"Love's quite different," Bettina began her preparatory speech simply, looking most appealing in her best afternoon frock and her new dignity, "from what it was in our parents' time, I think. Or else they don't tell us the truth about when they were young."

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"Any more," murmured Nadine, "than you'll tell your granddaughter what you're discussing to-day."

"Oh, but I shall!" Bettina's eyes were wide and indignant. "I mean that my wisdom, hard won though it be, shall be of use to her! I'm taking the one way of learning anything that could help her. The one infallible guide," Bettina was marching along more confidently now. "Trite ground is always easier marching. 'The one infallible guide is experience. One's own, of course. We can't,'" insisted Bettina earnestly, "be saved from doing foolish things by hearing of others' mistakes. That's what makes life so full and interesting." Her eyes glowed.

"But you're so inconsistent," objected Nadine gently. "I thought *your* experience was to save your granddaughter!"

"And then," Betty not only acknowledged the weakness of her position, but went even further, "judging by Mendell's rules, and by tendencies and throwbacks and all that, I ought to have a very proper granddaughter." She pondered.

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"Still," she said brightly, in a moment, "one shouldn't think only of one's own personal granddaughter, should one? And, anyway, I've quite made up my mind."

"And his?" asked Nadine in a whisper.

"Yes," answered Bettina, quite unconscious of anything amusing.

"Trial marriage?" asked Nadine.

"Yes."

"When?"

Both men looked at her expectantly.

"At once," her voice was firm.

Both men seemed pleased.

"And I'm sure you all agree with me it's quite the thing to do."

"Quite," said Temp in emphatic tones.

"Quite," answered William Clark, in tones no less emphatic.

The girls, being speechless, were understood as acquiescing.

"Then that's settled," said Bettina again, this time with a final and satisfied sigh. "I'll try a month with each."

CHAPTER VIII

BETTINA TAKES HER HAT AND GOES

“WHAT!” Both men sprang from their chairs at the same instant.

Bettina was amazed. “Why, you *said* you approved!” she reproachfully fixed her hurt eyes on each of them.

“But not with *him!*” both shouted.

“It’s outrageous!” gasped William Clark.

“But you just promised to do it,” marveled Bettina.

“It’s—it’s immoral,” stuttered Temp.

She turned amazed eyes upon him. “You just said it wasn’t!”

“But I didn’t know you were going to try it with him!”

Both men talked at once, in tones of horror and mounting rage.

“Dear me,” said Bettina.

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"The way of the reformer is hard," murmured Nadine.

"It is the principle of the thing I care about," announced Betty firmly, getting the reins in her hands again. "If you two don't want to experiment for the good of humanity, I don't doubt that I can find someone else who will."

The two were frozen into silence. They did not doubt it themselves.

"I'll do it," said Temp, in a small voice.

"And I," added William Clark meekly.

Bettina went on, calmly ignoring their misery.

"You live with such utterly different backgrounds. I shall never know unless I tried each, which I preferred. First I shall go to Greenwich Village."

She did not notice the collapsed appearance of the spruce and dapper Mr. Clark.

"The Village," corrected Nadine. "Time was when it was 'Greenwich Village,' but now to say anything but the Village, places one at once as not being of the elect."

"Not there!" pleaded Mr. Clark.

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"Oh, I don't believe it's as interesting as you think," Betty reassured him, while Temp took up a proprietary position at her side. "I heard that people kissed at the Brevoort. So I went there with a party, and we all sat there all evening, eating the most amazing assortment of things."

"Didn't you see even one kiss?" asked Ruth.

"One." Betty was truthful, but she added in a tone of disappointment, "But I was told afterward that they were married."

"Betty! Give it up!" Clark came nearer and spoke pleadingly.

"Our parents," Betty told him in her best lecture tones, "used to learn from books. This generation believes in the laboratory method."

"But why don't you really marry?" Clark would rather give her up than countenance such rashness. "It's more decent."

"Are you sure," Betty turned to him interestedly, "or did you, like Thompson, get it out of a book?"

"He couldn't," interjected Nadine, looking across at Clark pityingly. "Most books now-

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adays are written to show how indecent marriage is."

"Really!" William was in distress. He turned on the two. "Didn't your mothers teach you there are some things too sacred to be mentioned?"

"But it was you, William, who mentioned marriage first," Betty pointed out truthfully.

"But to think of your talking about trial marriage!"

"Don't be shocked," Betty comforted him. "It isn't as if I were only talking of it, to make conversation. You see, I'm really going to do it."

He groaned.

Ruth felt for him. She pleaded with Betty.

"People will cut you."

"We won't see them."

"All uptown goes slumming," Nadine reminded her. "One meets one's mother's schoolmates in every tea-room."

"Yes, but we won't be in tea-rooms. You see I'm marrying a Villager. And no Villager ever frequents the Village. It's like the Woolworth Tower—it only appeals to outsiders."

BETTINA GOES

"Where are the real Villagers, then?" Ruth wanted to know.

"In their studios, I suppose," answered Betty.

"More likely in each other's, from what one hears," murmured Nadine.

There was a strangled sound from William.

"Betty, honey," he pleaded, with the world-old power that does not depend upon logic, but upon eyelashes and things. "We're all being hysterical. Let's let all this go." He looked very handsome and very much in love. It is difficult to tell which is the more moving to a girl.

Bettina visibly weakened.

Then Temp bent over her. If William was handsome at the moment, what could be said of Temp? He looked a young god, negligently lighting on earth for a few idle moments. One wanted to clutch him and take no chances.

"Let someone else experiment," he suggested, looking down beneath all the ordinary things in her eyes, and stirring up things from

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the deeps that had never come to the surface before.

It wasn't what he said, but the wonder of that look.

The others wisely rested their case. There was a silence. Betty sat, thinking it all over.

They waited a long time. Then, "I'll give it up," she renounced many things in that sigh, but she was cheerfully courageous, and determined not to mourn. She meant to be a good loser.

Her sigh was echoed by four others, palpably of relief.

She rose, and shrugged the burdens of humanity from her shoulders with a gesture which she must have known was becoming.

"Well," she said briskly, in a voice that advertised her readiness to let bygones be bygones, "shall we have some tea?" She rang.

Hilary answered. From the way she came into the room, one could see that she had expected Betty now to be alone. Her cheeks were swollen, her eyelids still clinging moistly, and her usual effacing calm was routed.

Betty went to her at once.

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There was a murmur of explanation and vague comforting.

"He's left me!" the others could hear. "And even taken the silver!"

"Her husband. Her wedding silver," Betty explained briefly, turning dramatically to the others.

A sympathetic murmur answered her.

"And I saw them married. A veil and everything. With two rings," enumerated Betty viciously. She put her arm protectingly about her weeping maid's shoulders, and faced the world.

"This is what happens when one gets properly married!" she cried. "Now you see! This proves how necessary it is to test them first!"

Nadine turned a look of distaste and enumerating scorn upon her hostess' two suitors. She seemed to be summing up their faults.

"Still, I don't believe they'd steal your silver, Betty," she murmured reflectively.

Bettina took no notice.

"This is the way it's always been!" she cried furiously. "*Someone's* got to do something!"

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All was lost. She was determined to go ahead with her plan, and this time she was not to be diverted.

William realized it, and groaned audibly.

Bettina looked at him with the calm, dissecting eye of a physician. "And I think," she announced, "that the sooner it's all over the better. So," she turned, "if you don't mind waiting a minute, Temp, I'll come right down to the Village with you now."

Quite ignoring the limp conditions of her auditors, she turned to go up-stairs.

"I'll just get my hat." She paused in thought. "And my purse," she added.

CHAPTER IX

BETTINA LUNCHES ON LOTUS

NIBBLERS of lotus! So Bettina had always thought of them, with a sort of pleasant, languorous envy, having no suspicion that eternal lotus lunches get on one's nerves. Even the Villagers themselves seldom know that what is the matter with them is indigestion due to over-indulging in lotus leaves.

Bettina had been eating lotus for a week, and liked the taste. She had been accustomed for some years to spending her energy in work, and she found it just as hard, but so much more interesting, to spend it in discussion.

She learned to grow madly excited over the question of whether Kreymborg and Areusberg had done anything significant in *vers libre* or were merely poseurs, and which was the more hopelessly reactionary, Harriet Monroe or Margaret Anderson.

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She grew used to being taken about to messy studios, and searching horrible daubs on canvas not yet dry, for elusive meanings.

She played a system. She had three remarks, which she used in rotation, and if there chanced to be a fourth painting or tortured lump of clay to be viewed she threw her soul into her eyes and stood silent, visibly moved beyond words.

She was very popular in the Village. Not being engaged in making masterpieces she had time to be civil to those who were. And the edge of hearing people argue had not yet worn off for her.

She was neither cultivated enough nor impolite enough to see through anything, which made it lovely for everybody, especially Temp.

This evening they were spending, as usual, in the tea-rooms of the Village, with the cup that cheers and the talk that inebriates. They usually circled about from one to another, having a dance here, and a cup of tea there, but tonight they had wandered down Christopher and decided to spend the evening at twenty-one.

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As Temp knocked at the door, and Romany Marie herself in her gypsy costume admitted them to the riot of color and talk, Betty gasped with the surprise that a week had not dimmed.

The checker-board youth now looked indescribably statuesque in his wrinkled corduroys, with his wavy blond hair quite unsubdued, and she liked being seen with him. He led her to a place at a low, long table.

"I love you," he whispered with a striking fervor, as he helped her out of her coat, and looked glowingly into her eyes.

The phonograph was filling the tobacco-laden room with a gay gypsy air.

"This is life!" thought Bettina again, with a scornful memory of William Clark.

She sat pensively at the red and black table; and listening to Temp's poetic voice ordering things, she mechanically got ready her purse.

"And goat's meat," said her escort, and a little later, "Turkish coffee." She went on listening dreamily, half to him, and half to the murmuring groups about her.

"Atmosphere!" she said to herself ecstatic-

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ally. "Atmosphere!" and felt that at last everything had come right in her life.

She moved a purple candle a bit to one side, and smiled across the red and black table to Temp.

He gazed at her ardently. "Shall I read you a poem?" he asked.

"Do," she assented. It is so easy to keep one's husband happy in the Village.

But he had no sooner smoothed out the wrinkled bit of paper from his pocket than they were surrounded by a blasé party of habitués who were bored with each other, and forced in desperation to attach themselves to any new victims.

Temp eyed them with a melancholy gaze. They, being poets and things themselves, would give him no applause. From the uptowners alone comes the Villagers' moral support. He put the crumpled paper sadly back into his pocket.

Marie brought viands, lovely, colorful things as vivid and different as herself; and the conversation grew in volume, Bettina crying out as excitedly as anyone.

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Talk! It was what they lived on. Their eyes brightened, their faces glowed. Bettina could not know that those who "hit the pipe" of conversation are just as surely drugged as the victims of commoner and more legislated-against substances. She had noticed at first that their actions were strange, but she hardly realized that she herself was so soon showing the effects of indulgence.

School teaching and such steady things seemed already hazy, unreal. The drug had got her. Unless she pulled up she would be as incapable of getting back to normal life as the other moths that gather nightly around the flame of the candles of Sheridan Square.

But Bettina was not an introspective soul. She had never even been psyched.

She believed, with Henley and the orthodox, that she was the captain of her soul, but she had never studied up on navigation. So she drifted happily on, and did not realize that the Village was closing round her, like a sleepy amœba, and hungrily making her a part of its amorphous self.

She only knew she was having a good time.

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She had not been lazy for a long while, and she particularly enjoyed the sensation.

With Temp and his friends it had long ceased to be a sensation, and was a permanent state. It had become a necessity to them, but had lost its thrill. They enjoyed her fresh young enthusiasm.

Bettina was having the slang phrases of the proletariat explained to her, but she usually forgot them later. She was learning more about freedom. She had always known that it had something to do with smocks, but hadn't known exactly what.

She was finding out to-night more about the class war, and class consciousness, and things like that.

But she was bewildered; rather lost in the tangled streets of this new paradise into which they were leading her. She had always thought that the people in smocks hated the rich—the capitalists, she corrected herself meticulously in her thoughts. But now it seemed that they did not hate *them* at all. They had one hate and only one: the bourgeoisie. And that was what she was one of. It was strange.

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She could see why they might hate the capitalists, that was logical enough, but why, with one accord, all the "thinking people of the world" should turn and rend (in their hearts, at least) the apparently inoffensive bourgeoisie was mysterious.

She wondered what was the matter with the bourgeoisie.

But she did not dare ask. She had heard that if one listened long enough one would be enlightened without needing to ask. But she had listened a very long time and had not found out what it was that was the matter with them. She was sure Temp must know. But, being one herself, she rather hated to ask Temp. So she merely squeezed his hand under the table.

He returned the pressure, though his thoughts at the moment were with Krupatkin. That is the lovely thing about Village men: they are the only ones who can combine their business and their love-making. Their business being to talk, and getting transacted mostly in tea-rooms, where the groups about the tables include earnest girls, though not too

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earnest to know the most effective things to do with eyes.

Greenwich Village is to the intellectual world what California is to retired financiers—a playground, a reward, a vantage ground from which to pity the toiling rest of the world who have not yet arrived there.

Bettina looked, with the eyes of a Villager, back at her old self in amazement and scorn. She wondered how people could be like that, and why something wasn't done to dispose of them.

How wonderful of Temp to have rescued her! She slid her arm over until their shoulders touched.

After all, why shouldn't she find out now?

"But why is it the bourgeoisie we hate?" she asked.

But no one answered. The discussion was racing past her, leaving her dizzily behind.

"What have they done?" she inquired confidentially of the young man who sat on the other side of her.

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He waved his hands, as if what they had done were too well known to need explanation. "They're such guinea-pigs!" he added.

"I've not a doubt of it," Bettina said. "But exactly what ——"

It was of no use. The young man was declaiming with the rest, in an instant, about things which Bettina didn't know about in terms which she had never heard.

She looked about at the other tables, hoping, in desperation, to find someone like herself. Not that she wanted to talk to such a person, but it would be a comfort just to know if one were there.

But, as far as the eye could reach, everyone was talking, excitedly, madly.

"Oh, dear," said Bettina.

Finally the young man took notice of her again.

"Write?" he asked. And before he could ask her the list of other things,

"Oh, no," she answered hurriedly. Then, with her new-found experience of people, thinking it might be a prelude to a poem, she added politely, "But I like to listen."

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However, the young man's hand did not go to his pocket.

He glanced toward Temp. "I dare say you're kept rather busy these days?"

Guilelessly Bettina accepted this as a mere attempt at being nice to her.

"Oh, yes!" she said. "We've been telling each other the history of our lives, like the Trojans, or was it Trojans? in the Iliad, or was it the Odyssey?"

"Yes, I know," said the young man sympathetically. "My mythology is like that too."

They smiled, and Bettina began to feel more friendly toward his political theories.

And just then someone called him from another table, and the young man had to go. Life is like that.

Bettina saw him fish helplessly for a moment in a chaotic heap of wraps, pull out a coat and hat, and leave with another man. She never saw him again.

That was the worst of the Village, she reflected mournfully, it was just one long ball, in which one lost one's momentary conversational

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partners, in the crowd. Even husbands and wives, she heard.

Bettina had been looking about since she had come downtown. One walked in and out of the marriage state unconsciously, it seemed. It wasn't so bad being married, she saw. Everyone either had been, or was about to be. Like seeing a snake slough his skin; she never seemed able to discover anyone who was in the present state of being married. Lately, that is, she hadn't been able to.

Life was becoming very complicated.

CHAPTER X

FOR A TIME

THE door opened again to let in an array of startling color. One could always tell at a distance the slummer from the slummed by the color they wore. Uptowners dress, as a rule, rather sadly, while the Villager has a gaudy taste in dyes. Whether due to Robert Edmund Jones, or the Liberal Club masquerades, color has come into its own.

“Hello, Paula!”

“Come on over!”

Their table having more lung power than the others, the three newcomers crowded into the scanty space on the bench beside Bettina.

There were introductions, which cleared up nothing, as no one's last names were ever given, and one usually mixed up the first ones anyway.

The one in the orange smock seemed to be

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Paula and to write poetry and Betty gathered that the one in the purple and green hand-woven gown was Petra and the red one Nessa. Temp himself had introduced her to Paula, proudly.

Paula, sitting next Bettina, beamed at her.

“Husbands are so in the way, aren’t they?” she remarked cordially. “I know Bob is. I couldn’t get any writing done. I thought up all sorts of things. One of my friends got him to act in the Provincetown Players, and rehearsals gave me a blessed series of evenings in peace, but finally the plays came off, and then there were no more rehearsals.” Her voice was aggrieved and mournful.

“Dear me,” said Bettina.

Her neighbor nodded in unhappy confirmation. “I was at my wits’ end.” Her face brightened and she lowered her tones confidentially: “Now I have hired Stella Palmer to flirt with him. Yes. I pay her so much a week. She takes him around to tea-rooms and lets him read poetry to her. And you can’t imagine the amount of work I get done.”

“Dear me,” said Bettina.

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She remembered now who Paula was. A very well-paid magazine poet, who wrote mushy verse as a job, and soulful lovely things for nothing for "The Quill" and "The Pagan." She had done a novel or two also, and Bettina remembered Temp mentioning that she was working on one now.

"The only trouble is," Paula was saying, sadly, "I'm afraid he'll get bored with her before the last chapter's done. I'm only on the third now."

Bettina was wondering helplessly exactly what one was supposed to say, when she was saved the trouble of answering.

A lanky man with tortoise-shell glasses, which gave him a whimsical, arresting appearance, had come in, carrying a ukelele painted in village colors with a startling cat, and a sort of mixed up totem pole effect.

"Good! It's Bobby Edwards!" explained a Spanish-looking novelist opposite Bettina.

"He makes them out of cigar boxes," he added, seeing her eyes on the cat.

"Have you ever heard Bobby Edwards sing?" Nessa asked her.

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"He never really says anything shocking in his songs, but he always looks as if he were on the verge of it. So people sit about, hoping. For hours."

The room had grown silent. Hoping.

But Bobby seemed unaware of the presence of anyone save the two or three cronies about him.

He raised the ukelele casually.

The room caught its breath.

He laid it down again.

The room sighed sadly.

"Oh, why doesn't somebody *make* him!"

Betty was savage with desire.

"You can't make him do anything," said the novelist dolefully. "He's an artist."

The hum of conversation had begun again. Bettina heard bits of sentences, love-making, quarrels.

"I don't really love him," Petra was telling Nessa, reflectively. "But if I go to a play with him, I would much rather it would be one with a scene played in the dark."

Then their amateur psychology was blotted

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out by the novelist's loud experience with thieving editors.

"Why don't you come down here to live?" one man with ruffled, poetic hair was asking another.

"We'd like to. We've a place on the Drive. We can't afford to live in the Village."

Then she lost that in the soft murmur of a conversation behind her:

"She used to be married to him, didn't she? I should think she'd be embarrassed at meeting him."

"Oh, no. One really is not expected to remember farther back than the second last."

Paula had overheard also. The two looked at each other.

"Oh, yes," answered Paula composedly.

"You see," she went on, "there's no point in not being frank down here. Most of us women write or something. We don't need to attract men. But the ordinary girl in middle class surroundings must. Therefore her speech must be reserved, whether she feels that way or not. Men are so attracted by a woman's innocence."

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She was silent a moment. "Still," she ruminated, "think of the leagues and leagues of innocence of the old maids of the world. And none of them seem to be charmed with that.—Strange, isn't it?"

Bettina admitted that it was strange.

"Odd about men, anyway. They don't realize that they're not the only ones who are aware of facts. They seem never to remember that it was Eve who nibbled at the apple first. In fact, they take the ground that no real lady knows what grows on apple trees." She sipped her coffee musingly. "And we never deceive them, the dears."

Bettina had forgotten to listen to the more general conversations at the table.

Paula went on, after dexterously appropriating an extra cup of coffee from the area of someone who was far too interested in gesticulating his views on the drama.

"They like," she said, "as a *great* treat to show us bits."

"I know a girl," she remembered, "awfully clever girl. She had done settlement work and gone into the most awful places eight hours

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a day every day, and she loved to forget all about it Saturday night. There was a most formal and proper man, paying her attention. He asked her to go out with him one Saturday, and, as a great favor, and as part of showing her New York, he took her slumming."

She lighted another cigarette appropriated from a silver case on the nearest table.

"The dears," she said.

CHAPTER XI

AND FINDS IT NOT SO FILLING AS IT MIGHT BE

“Go on,” said Bettina.

Paula appeared mildly amused.

“I do, don’t I?” she confessed, in her caressing contralto, which rather “got” Bettina. “I oughtn’t, really. No writer should talk. It’s downright waste.”

Betty was somewhat shocked at this selfishness, which she had uncovered in Temp as well. Dear Temp, so naïvely unconscious of being anything but noble! Bettina caught herself already thinking in Paula’s jargon. She was too darned adaptable, that was what was the matter with her, she told herself.

Paula had already forgotten what they had been chatting about. She looked about the room, with dreamy satiric eyes.

“Queer thing, Life,” she said. “*We* say it’s a merry-go-round. And the uplift crowd

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think it's a sort of escalator; you just stand on a step and do nothing, and up you go, up, up, up! Have a cigarette?"

Betty blushed. "I never learned."

"How clever of you. You know, it's not such a bad card to play, even here. White dress and blue sash. All that sort of thing."

Bettina protested, and blushed even harder.

"Not bad," commented Paula again, with an appraising glance at the blush. "You'll find it very useful. A weapon in need. As for myself, I've nothing but my arresting frankness. Oh yes, if you carry a defect far enough, it becomes a charm."

"What are you two so interested in?" asked Temp, bending over to catch a word.

"Men. What else?" said Paula, and calmly shoved him back into the whirlpool of the noisier discussion.

Comfortably on the shore of it, she smiled at Betty, her smile merging itself into a greeting to a newly arrived, severely tailored woman, with a capable face.

"Who is she?" asked Betty.

"Can't think of her name. She's very ener-

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getic," answered Paula, stirring her coffee. "She used to want a vote; wants something else now, I believe."

Betty looked interestedly about her.

"Everyone's like someone, aren't they?" she commented ungrammatically.

"What do you mean?" asked Paula idly, her eyes ticketing the assembly.

But Bettina was only reflecting to herself that Paula was Nadine all over, and that the girl named Petra was exactly like Ruth, shy to look at, but a grim pursuer, nevertheless.

Now Paula wasn't, or Nadine. They didn't have to be. They were so distinctly not in need of men that they were certain never to be without.

Nessa, Betty gathered, was married, but it seemed to make no appreciable difference to her admirers, and certainly not to Nessa.

"I'm thinking a little about being married," Petra was saying to Nessa. "I should so like to be eternally adored."

Paula turned. "I thought you were thinking of getting married?" she remarked in her blasé voice, too tired for irony.

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"Oh, of course, not properly married," Petra hastened to assure her.

"What do you mean by properly married? A ceremony?"

"Oh, no! Washing dishes."

"But I can't find anyone interesting enough," she went on after a moment.

"One doesn't," answered Nessa. "One simply takes the most interesting available. I did. Mother was shocked when I told her so. She says one doesn't choose one's most *interesting* suitor. She says it's not decent. But I'll wager *she* did it. I've noticed that parents describe as not decent all the things they did and don't want us to find out."

Bettina heard a good deal about Paula's marriage then, and her husband. It seemed that they fell in love at sight and were almost as immediately married.

And so they came to the Village, where nobody lives happily ever after; where, in fact, it would be looked upon as the worst sort of faux pas, not to speak of scandal, for anybody to live happily six months or a year after, let alone forever.

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Happiness is stagnation, the Villagers believe, to say nothing of being an impossibility anyway.

After Paula's confidences and comments came Nessa's.

Poor Bettina, gravely trying to find her way about in the marshes and morasses of marriage, and eternally stepping on squashy corpses of those who had floundered on before her!

Betty's attention was deflected for a moment by something Temp was saying, but, as their discussion was of art or politics or something vague and beautiful, she soon came back to the girls' more practical one.

"Country boys and girls marry young," Petra asserted.

"Yes," Nessa's tone was indulgent, "but then in town we have the theatre and such things."

"I imagine," added Paula, "that now since motion pictures are penetrating everywhere, there will be a change in the statistics in the country. One can get almost as many thrills from the movies as from being married."

"Paula, how can you say such things?"

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Petra's outraged expression was for all the world like Ruth's, Betty thought.

"Why not? Which are you defending? Marriage or the movies?"

"Are you bored, Hon?" asked Temp, tenderly. His blue eyes still looked innumerable postscripts to his most casual sentence.

At their glance Betty always lost her head. It was so unlike the way persons looked at one another above Fourteenth Street. There was no romance from Fifteenth up. She wondered how people at, say, Forty-seventh, sustained life.

"I'm having a lovely time," she told him.

"I could never get tired of tea-rooms!" she added fervently and honestly.

"I missed the Village when I was on my trip last summer," contributed Petra, sighing in sympathy. "There isn't anything like this out West."

"No," asserted Nessa. "But then, people are so much more wholesome in the West, don't you think? And then, of course, there are enough men to go round out there."

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"But they really are," Petra asserted, earnestly supporting the wholesome theory.

"It must have something to do with the longitude—or is it latitude? It's so long since I had botany. Or is it geology?"

Bettina gave a fleeting thought to the vanished young man who had sympathized with her mythology.

How good it was to have time to be inane, she reflected, and smiled contentedly.

Temp answered her smile.

"Glad?" he queried.

"Awfully!" said Bettina.

Temp melted with tenderness. "I adore you!" he whispered ardently, then added, "A dollar sixty." For everybody was paying up, and Betty had made a dash for the menu to figure out theirs.

She picked up her velvet bag and found the coin purse.

Something about paying for Temp's food was beginning to get on her nerves. But she reproached herself for her unworthy feeling. "What is money, anyway?" she asked herself scornfully; "it's not worth thinking of," she

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answered. "Nothing matters but love, nothing!" she said to herself. And with a tender smile at Temp, she paid the bill.

CHAPTER XII

BETTINA DISCOVERS THE REVOLUTION

THOUGH it was undoubtedly convenient for picnicking to old-timers like Temp and his friends, Bettina found Parnassus a very slippery place for one not used to it. The heights made her dizzy.

But it was all for the Revolution. She had progressed as far as the Revolution now. Not that she understood exactly what it was for, but she knew that it must be all right, or Temp would not have approved it.

As nearly as she could make out, every time a poet got a rejection slip he became more certain that the existing order of things must be destroyed. If he sold enough he became a bourgeois, and deserted the cause. There were many such traitors. Their friends remembered sadly their splendid youth, when they had been full of enthusiasm for the cause of humanity, before they had sold their souls.

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The best prices for souls, it seemed, were paid by William Randolph Hearst, but *The Ladies' Home Journal* and *Century* got some.

Temp seemed in no danger of selling his soul, owing to the fact that the editors had so much material on hand. Bettina breathed deep sighs of relief. She would hate to have had the people that are in tea-rooms calling Temp a traitor; or confiding to each other under their breaths that he had no civic consciousness.

Bettina had put on class hatred as she put on smocks, not that either was especially becoming to her, but they served to give pleasure to Temp, and make her look like the people about her.

Of the two, she preferred the smocks.

And it was not long before she began rather to enjoy both. They made her feel so immensely superior to William Clark and the people with whom she had once spent her days.

If there were little things about this paradise that vaguely disturbed her, she loyally put them from her mind, as unworthy thoughts.

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Still, as the days went by, she found that she was growing increasingly addicted to unworthy thoughts. At which discovery, of course, she redoubled her vigilance.

Bettina was trying her best to be a radical and have a message. She could not yet be said to have succeeded, but she believed that with diligence, she would in time.

If her money held out, that is. She had noticed with alarm that the price of hers and Temp's meals, not to mention the violets he bought her, and their other necessary expenses, were eating like acid into her small savings. At this rate, they would soon have nothing left—and then? Disaster. Providing Temp had not managed to sell his soul in the meantime to any appreciable extent. She had little fear of his doing so. She had learned now about magazines. They never bought real poetry, anything original or big. It was safer to print the rubber-stamp type of pretty verse, written by its regular standbys, as a rule. Real poets were not published in these days.

She had wondered a little why Temp and his friends continued writing poetry under such

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conditions, until she had asked outright. It was the inner consciousness.

At the same time, she could not help being a bit anxious about the expenses. She dared not mention it to Temp. It would have broken his writing mood for the day.

And besides, their love was such a perfect thing, an idyl of beauty. How could financial affairs have any kinship with a thing of the spirit? So she did all the worrying herself. She had a premonition that Temp was not very good at worrying anyway.

He lived on the heights. He was a closer follower of Beauty, a more exalted lover of Art than she had ever known existed. It was her part to shelter him from ugliness.

Besides, she loved to. He was so adorable. He so seriously believed her perfect. William Clark had seen her faults with an indulgent eye, but Temp did not see them at all. He linked her with the beautiful things of all ages.

It was wonderful to be wooed by a poet. He was unpractical, and rather lazy, and undoubtedly conceited, but he could, not only once, but steadily, day by day, transport her

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past all the boundaries of every-day, and give her license to live in a land of romance. And, after all, wasn't that the miracle that she had all her life before watched for in vain?

So Betty was happy.

And Temp was happy too. To tell the truth, it was not Betty's money, but Betty's charm and general dearness that made him so deeply contented. He really did not think of the money.

That was the trouble.

It is not the men who deliberately scheme to get control of their wives' money, but those who would scorn to touch it, if they thought of it, but are so lofty-minded that they never think of it at all, but believe vaguely that money drops from the sky, that make women unhappy.

Temp was a lineal descendent of Rip Van Winkle, beloved of children and dogs, the soul of good nature, but an exasperation to his wife, except that Betty, dear soul, was too admiring and too much in love to be exasperated.

As yet.

CHAPTER XIII

BETTINA PAYS THE BILLS

BETTINA was growing a little tired of the Revolution. Of course she would not have admitted it. But it was disconcerting to be dancing happily at the Radical Club with a beautiful, boyish-looking poet who had evidently been told he resembled Rupert Brooke, and to find, after admiring his dreamy profile, that he hoped in a few months to be going about with a rifle, killing bourgeoisie. Particularly if one were not quite certain yet whether one were open to attack or were regarded as belonging to the attacking party.

Bettina's girl friends, in her new environment, were extremely intense. Russian girls, very dumpy and brave, who lived for art and the revolution. They had to, really, usually having no looks to spare. Bettina, some way, did not share the prevailing admiration for

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them, although she made a valiant effort. Then there were the pseudo-Russian type, who had gone in for socialism, she was sure, because it afforded such an excellent opportunity for meeting young men. Girls who would have been wall-flowers in any other environment could shout their way into acquaintance with any number of members of a local.

Even beneath the play spirit, Betty found, lurked, like the extremely slippery brand of ice beneath the soil of a glacier, that basic revolution. She felt as if she had gone to live in a community of Adventists, who were momentarily expecting the second coming.

Being of a polite disposition, she expected it too, but, at the same time, if it had suddenly happened, she would have been considerably startled.

There were a good many things she would have liked to know about it. Temp, when approached, was rather vague. The revolution was clearly a necessity to any decent person, like washing behind the ears.

All party matters were a trifle vague. Of course Bettina understood very clearly about

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the Right and Left wings, though she usually had to stop and think before she could remember which was which.

But, though she was not always as enthusiastic as she might have been about the revolution, she liked the revolutionists tremendously. She wondered why it was that the people on the wrong side were always so much more interesting than the good ones.

William Clark seemed to her now a deady dull person. It would never have occurred to him to blow up anybody.

But these people were so childlike, so clearly and simply living in that renaissance of wonder, which Theodore Watts-Dunton, or someone, once started.

She was thinking of this as she looked about, at the Villagers, in a highly colored dancing den. She and Temp sat in a black recess at a green table. Temp, with a blank, rapt look, was making a poem. Betty was not particularly excited about it. She had found that Temp's poems turned out to be pretty much all alike. Which made it so simple a matter to praise them. One had only to say the same

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thing over again. She had overheard one of Temp's poet friends say the formula once, so she knew it was correct.

And Betty so wanted to be correct. She had learned the truth that there is no time when it is so important to use the correct fork as when banqueting on nectar and ambrosia with the immortals.

Temp came momentarily out of his trance. She was looking unusually pretty.

"A penny for your thoughts," he bantered.

She looked at him caressingly. "Dear Temp, I'd have to supply the penny."

But he did not hear. He had gone back into the trance.

Betty was shocked at herself. How *could* she have been so crude? She was remorseful. Of course she shouldn't have blurted out a thing like that. It wasn't done. She knew very well that one told the truth fearlessly about the other classes, but never about one's own. And she hadn't really meant what she said. What was money, anyway?

"Dance?" asked someone, leaning gracefully over the black partition.

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"Oh!" said Bettina, and sprang up, eyes alight. Temp, his attention centered on the Muse, did not see her go. But every girl south of Fourteenth Street has to submit to being second to her rival, the Muse, in her cavalier's eyes, and it is just as well to be philosophical about it.

"How do you like the Village by this time?" asked her partner, swinging her dexterously past a fat slummer.

"Oh, I love it!"

"Like the people here, do you?"

"Oh, aren't they wonderful!"

He apologized to an irate lady who was seeing America first, and smiled pleasantly at his flattering partner.

"Why isn't everybody like the people here?" asked Betty enthusiastically.

"I'm glad you like the bunch."

"They're all so good to me. I can't think why."

Perhaps she might have thought why a few seconds later, but Betty was not good at putting two and two together. Besides being far too polite.

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When the music stopped, he caught at her arm. "Don't go back yet! You're—ah—such a good dancer."

"Oh," said Betty, overcome. She knew that she was the sort of dancer who, though she'd never been told she was bad, would have been told so if she'd had brothers.

"I want awfully to have this next with you. I'll be awfully disappointed ——"

She looked at Temp. The Muse was still at home to him, she saw.

"Do!"

"Well."

The music crashed into the mere buzz of talk and demolished it utterly.

"Yes, I'd rather dance with you than anyone here," he said.

"Really?" She looked about. All the other girls were real Villagers, hair, soul, and smock. Except, of course, the slummers who, in their attempt to get acquainted with the Village, of course danced with other slummers.

"Ah—I wondered if you could lend me a ten this week?" inquired her partner uninterestingly.

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“ I beg your pardon.”

“ Thought you wouldn’t mind.” He swept her gracefully into a lovely swing and pressed her hand accidentally.

“ Why—why ——”

“ Awfully good of you,” he said gratefully.
“ I’ll come over for it in a minute.”

After he took her back to Temp, she rather bewilderedly got her purse and found a bill. Whether it was she or her late partner found the opportunity to so adroitly change its ownership she was not certain. But there was nothing embarrassing about the ceremony. She had always vaguely thought it would be embarrassing for a man to borrow money from a woman. She had lent a good deal, off and on, to the dumpy girls in smocks, but that was different. Or was it? She felt uncertain. She might ask Temp. But she rather hesitated to ask Temp about this. One didn’t mention money to poets. And one saw that it was always there so that they did not need to mention it either.

He had read his poem and had her praise, and they had danced a waltz together.

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Then she had danced with a pleasant youth or two and heard things about the one-act play, and the decay of the sonnet-form.

"Have a cup of coffee with me, Miss Betty?" asked a melancholy novelist, who, she gathered, had not written one yet.

She was startled. But if there were, in her present acquaintance, one man willing to pay for what she ate or drank, she would not discourage him.

"I'd love to," she glowed, and they sought another recess with its green table.

"How's the world treating you?" he asked, kindly, after they were served.

She smiled happily.

"Glad to hear it," he answered. "I've been having a rotten time."

"I'm so sorry."

"Oh, it's only temporary. Only temporary. That's why I thought you'd not mind seeing me through, perhaps."

"Seeing you through?"

"You're the only one of us in a position to be a patron of the arts," he laughed.

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“One of us!” she glowed at the compliment in this.

“Oh—why ——” Her charming sympathy had taken the form of twenty-five dollars by the time their tête-à-tête was over.

She was somewhat bewildered, but frightfully pleased at the tribute of his trust in her. Temp’s friends had so hospitably accepted her and made her one of themselves.

She and Temp danced the next few dances, and then decided to go across the street to have a cup of tea and see who was there. He held her coat for her in his own graceful, grateful way, and she smiled at him as she always did. He was closing the door behind them as they were accosted by a couple coming in.

“Hello, Temp! ’Lo, Betty!”

They shook hands all round. Then as Temp and the girl seemed to be talking animatedly, the man drew her aside.

“Betty, you’re a good sport. I’ve brought Nina here, and I’ve not a cent in my pockets. You know her; she’s not a good fellow like you and most of the girls. I wouldn’t have her

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guess for anything. Slip me a dollar, won't you? Sh—Don't let them see."

Bettina had no time to think.

"You're the real thing, Betty. Do the same for you, some day. Ta-ta!"

Bettina reflected soberly that at this rate he would have to, but she stifled that selfish thought. What was a dollar? And what fun it was to be able to do something for these magnificent people! Their gratitude was pleasant. It was becoming a necessity to her. But what should she do when her money was gone?

"Let's dance and dance and dance," she cried feverishly, as they entered and met the strains of a new phonograph and the smocks of a new crowd. "I don't want to think!"

And they did, breathlessly, until a half dozen revelers attached them to their train and took them over to get ham sandwiches at a villainously untidy restaurant on Sixth Avenue.

As they walked up Sixth, Temp pointed to the window of a haberdashery.

"I've had my eye on that silk shirt all week," said he. "Just my color, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is."

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“Well, how about it?” said he gaily. “How’s the exchequer? Shall we come by to-morrow?”

They had dropped behind. The others were not noticing.

“Yes. Oh, yes. Only let’s not talk about it,” answered Bettina desperately. “Let’s forget about money.”

“Let’s,” assented Temp, and stopping a moment before they went on with the others, caught her bare hands in his, and bent his lovely head and kissed them with respectful adoration.

And Bettina forgot about money.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OVERHEAD ON PARNASSUS

“How very exciting to marry a radical!” Bettina had once breathed fervently. She still found radicals gloriously exciting. She adored them, as she adored orchids. But that wasn’t their only resemblance to orchids, she found. They, too, were expensive; really, she was beginning to fear, beyond the purse of a not too provident erstwhile school teacher.

It was quite all right to be cautious about orchids. But to think of one’s friends in terms of money was a mercenary, selfish thing. Bettina blushed when she found herself doing it, and always stopped.

Which was the reason, perhaps, for the fact that, as the end of the month drew near, so too approached the end of her savings account. But the race was unequal, or Bettina was really not so careful as she might have been, for,

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finally, quite a week before the month of probation was up, she found she had spent every cent she owned in the world.

Except three. These she slipped into a Salvation Army box, from some obscure motive of turning to good works at the last.

When he found their source of income stopped, Temp did not blame her. Still, it was unfortunate, as he was in the midst of reading up on the Elizabethan dramatists and imbibing into his spirit something of the atmosphere of their times. And while imbibing atmosphere one really should not be jarred.

Bettina, who was to have been his inspiration, had proved the means of bringing him unpleasantly to earth. She felt her failure keenly.

She did her best. She went to such of her debtors as were not sufficiently psychologists to read her need in her eye, and escape; and asked them if they could lend her a dollar or two. They were ever so pleasant about it.

Like editors, they softened their regrets in the most thoughtful way.

Temp and Betty were able to obtain a few

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meals on credit, by going to a different place each time.

Temp said he understood now for the first time why there were so many eating places in the Village. But obviously this could not last.

Also they discovered, about the second day of their strategy, that the proprietors must know each other, and, odious thought, be low enough to gossip about their friends.

The third day they had no breakfast at all. One's brain was really clearer for it, Temp said.

Betty, for her part, found hers quite hideously clear.

And anyway, they had a perfectly good invitation to luncheon. It was from two brightly interested elderly ladies whom they had once detested. But it is remarkable what good qualities are sometimes hidden beneath unpromising exteriors. So they had accepted.

But during the forenoon, as Temp was getting on famously in his grafting of atmosphere, a knock introduced a kindly neighbor.

“'Phone message for you.”

It was from their elderly hostesses.

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"She said, would you mind coming next Thursday instead. She said she'd be so glad to know it didn't make any difference to you."

"I'd be glad to know it didn't make any difference to us, too," said Temp, bitterly, after the neighbor had gone.

But what should they do? Betty stared at him speechless.

He stared back. "Do you know," he whispered hoarsely, "I hadn't noticed it before, but I'm hungry."

She received his remark in silence. She hadn't noticed it before, either, but now, strangely, so was she. Then she rose and laughed.

"We're imagining it," she said. "Go on reading, Temp. You'll probably not feel it then. Would you like to read me a poem?" It was her greatest sacrifice. But this time it did not help.

Temp took a melancholy survey of the past few months. He knew that he had borrowed all that he ever would be able to of his acquaintances. Bettina had been his last chance. Although he did not think of her that way.

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He thought of her as a charming and perfect creature.

He so much preferred to think of beauty than of sordid things.

He turned to Betty, half unconsciously hoping that she might lead his mind gently away.

But Bettina seemed to be busy.

There was no escape from harassing thoughts. For perhaps the first time in his life, Temp was alone with reality.

And in such a tête-à-tête, his powers of repartee were decidedly feeble.

CHAPTER XV

TEMP BUYS A TON OF COAL

THERE is a great gulf fixed between those who work and those who talk for a living.

It is fixed by the scorn of those who talk.

They are so much cleverer. Dimly Bettina had divined that, from above Fourteenth. Now she reveled in it. It was so wonderful to be allowed to listen.

And she was allowed to listen. Always. No one ever heard her through a sentence. But why should they? She was not clever. It was Temp who was that. But he had not been clever enough to think out a way to escape the boredom of not eating. He had been left alone with despair.

But in the Village one does not stay long alone in despair. One's friends drop into one's studio at all hours to talk about editors. Singly, or twos, or threes, or often, hordes. Hordes are better, for then one does not have

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to join in the conversation at all. Like mothers who have five or six children, one finds that they amuse each other, and leave one free to work in peace.

Artists are undisturbed by the friendly practice, for they can go on painting precisely as well. As for poets, they are better off still, for, when bothered for an extra line, a rhyme or a metaphor, they have only to ask the company.

And, as on that day, so on succeeding ones, their friends had dropped in, drifting pleasantly away again about meal-time, and leaving the querulous Temp to the now somewhat thoughtful Bettina.

And so the days went slowly by. Their devices were devious. Sometimes they were able to borrow the price of a meal, and sometimes not. They had always run bills. Betty had been able to pay them before. This time she could not. And to make matters worse, these bills began now to come in.

About the fourth day of the lean years, there was a ring at the door. It presaged an expressman who grimly proposed to deliver a ton

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of coal. Temp had bought it when they were prosperous, in a spasmodic effort to be provident and far-seeing, as the price of coal was about to advance. Bettina had paid for it, and both had promptly forgotten about it.

But now the truly alarming question, considering the size of the apartment, arose. Where should they store it?

"Put it in the bath tub," suggested Nessa in her practical way. She had just dropped in, along with two or three others who seemed, as usual, to have nothing particular to do, and who loved to do it in company. "Put it in the bath tub, of course," she repeated impatiently.

"But that's just what the whole discussion's been about," explained Temp. "We haven't any bath tub."

"Here, here!" interrupted the booming voice of the expressman, "I can't wait all day. *Where* do you want this coal?"

"Well," answered Temp, "as a matter of fact, my dear sir, we don't want it at all, but if you insist ——"

"None of your cheek. If you don't look

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alive, I'll put it in the middle of the floor." He turned from them to the stairs. "Jake!"

"Oh, no," implored Bettina, "don't do that!" She turned wide, frightened eyes upon the accomplice of Jake.

Then she adopted more practical methods. "Nessa, get off that trunk. Do you mind? Temp, drag that other one here. Both of you help me take the things out." And in a few moments most of the coal was stored, while the remainder of it and Bettina's party dresses filled the studio.

Thus one problem was solved, but every time they solved a problem it seemed only to give place to a score of others. Usually they did not solve them. They only shoved them in on top of each other like Bluebeard's wives, on the theory that one might as well have twenty skeletons in the closet as one.

But problems did not annoy Temp, except momentarily. His was a mind trained for so long to contemplate beauty that now it turned away automatically from contemplating anything else.

As for Bettina, she could not plan and ar-

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range, and at the same time be a cheery, bright companion, and she considered it her duty to Art to keep Temp happy. It was only when he was happy that he was able to do his best work.

Bettina had an uneasy presentiment that somewhere in the future was awaiting a terrible crash, but she tried not to think of it, and, anyway, she always *had* liked to dance. Why should one spoil one's good times with gloomy forebodings? So she just put the bills unopened into Temp's waste-paper basket with all the discarded first drafts of his poems, and he and she were very happy.

CHAPTER XVI

MUST THERE ALWAYS BE CAUSES?

THE day after Temp's coal was delivered they had more callers than usual. The girls seemed by some fatality to chance to sit in the places where there was the most coal, and smudge their light georgette dresses lamentably, while the men seemed to get tangled hopelessly in the masses of party dresses hanging fluffily from chandeliers, hooks, chairs and screens. It was not exactly a successful party.

It distressed Betty's hospitable soul not to be able to offer anyone anything to eat, but she knew that if they once got really interested in a conversation, no one would probably know the difference.

Therefore she relaxed with relief when she heard the talk take a political turn. She had hoped for that or free verse, either one.

She smiled across at Temp.

He beamed at her.

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Their guests were having a good time now. They were all talking at once. But this was rather disastrous to Betty's wardrobe, because the more thoroughly interesting the discussion became, the more the talkers became enmeshed in the dangling sashes and ribbons of her party dresses, and the more unseeingly and rudely they cast off the trammeling bonds. There were sounds about the room of rips and tears, and Bettina had a disturbed moment when she reflected upon what an easy missile loose coal would prove to people who found themselves seriously disagreeing with one another.

Perhaps it was these uneasy thoughts which made it impossible for her to feel the usual glamour which talk of these brilliant people produced. She was like a late-coming spectator at a display of Hindu magic, who has by an oversight not been hypnotized.

She could not see what these people saw. She had seen it before, but not this time. She was somewhat dismayed. She listened closely, more ready to be convinced than ever. But the miracle did not work.

Doubt had entered, like the snake in the gar-

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den, and she was no longer content with the Eden of her new political beliefs.

Her eyes went timidly to Temp for help, but Temp was talking too. How disappointed he would be in her!

But suddenly she didn't care. Suddenly she knew she was tired, tired, tired of the Revolution. She knew the bitter truth about herself. She had never really cared about the Right and Left wings.

Bettina mixed all things radical in one amicable heap in her mind. The cults that fought each other most bitterly seemed to her the same thing. But in that she was like most other people.

She sat stricken while the talk went soaringly on. Temp's eyes were starry, his face was that of the statue of a Greek god suddenly come alive, and so alive! Talking always was becoming to Temp.

He cared tremendously about what they were saying. Bettina had cared, too, yesterday. But to-day she did not. And no, she hadn't, really, yesterday. It was just because it had been different that she thought it won-

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derful. It was just because William Clark and the great mass of middle-class humanity who had never been below Fourteenth, thought these doctrines incendiary and dreadful that she had been fascinated by them.

But why wasn't she fascinated now? As she sat there she tried desperately to be, but she couldn't. She was tired of the special brand of slang that went with it. She felt that if she heard the words "syndicalism," "capitalistic press," "exploited," "revolution," once more, she should scream.

And, really, there was not room to scream, in the Village.

She looked at Temp's nose. How Greek and beautiful it was! Surely she could refrain from thinking of radical theories if she kept her eyes firmly upon Temp's nose!

No one noticed that she was not listening. Everyone was too busy talking to be polite. Not that they usually were, anyway. The men believed too firmly that women were their equals to be courteous to girls, and the girls believed it too firmly to be courteous to each other.

MUST THERE BE CAUSES?

All would have been well had not the fattest of the Russian girls taken occasion to speak softly of the Cause.

Someone rose from her seat. Her chair scraped noisily. Everyone turned to look at her.

“Oh,” said Bettina, with a low moan, “must there *always* be causes?” She clutched at her chair back. There were desperation and pleading in her tones.

A tense silence held the room. The mouth of the Russian girl gaped. The thin suffrage lecturer looked disapprovingly at Betty. She always *had* distrusted her. She was much too pretty.

Betty turned to Temp pleadingly, mildly intent on explaining.

“I am so tired of there always being causes,” she said.

Temp rose and went sympathetically over toward her.

“She’s a little unstrung,” he told the company. “She’s been dancing every night—and all these meetings and things,” his words trailed off vaguely.

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There was a sympathetic murmur. A little after, the party were all having coffee on Sixth. The prettiest girl leaned over kindly to Betty.

“Dear Betty,” she said, and patted her hand. “I’ve a little capsule I take. It quiets the nerves wonderfully. I’ll bring you over a couple to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XVII

BETTINA AND THE BUS CONDUCTOR

THE dense crowds on top of buses, except for those obviously lovers, are made up of people who have been jilted, or whose shares in oil mines have proven worthless. They climb to the top with melancholy faces, and half an hour later climb down beaming good-will, and health thoughts. The power of nature and the open air is well known, but it must be an influence subtler than that. Perhaps there is something about the green paint.

All the usual types were present to-day, paying their fee of ten cents to be "psyched" by Nature. Besides, Bettina was on the bus. It seemed to be the only place just now where she could be alone.

She had a good deal to think over. Many things had happened since that eventful day now almost a month ago, when she had gone

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off to embrace blindly whatever causes there might be. So many theories had been hurled at her at once that she had to be alone a bit to unsnarl them.

She was already ashamed of her ungrateful outburst about causes. She had even taken the capsules. But she still seemed to have nerves. She had never had nerves above Fourteenth Street, but then she loyally refused to remember that.

But, there were so many sensations she was feeling just now. Could it be that she was tiring of things in Elysium? Could it be that she was homesick?

Ever since coming to the Village Bettina had felt uneasily a lack of something.

Finally she had begun dimly to comprehend that it might be soap.

"Where," she said to herself, "do these Bolsheviks ever get soap boxes anyway? One would think they'd be the last persons to have them! And what do they do with the soap first? I think no evidences have ever been discovered?" None, since she had been in the Village, had ever been found by her.

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Ever since Bettina had discovered the class war, she had been too wildly excited to care greatly about clean table-cloths or such things, but now she began to have a hankering for the flesh pots.

She went up to the Public Library for a sight of a quiet, clean, orderly place, and had no sooner sunk gratefully into a seat at one of the long tables than she looked across to find an unkempt, shaggy, anarchist-looking person opposite her. She did not feel that he had less right to be there than anyone else—only she had come for a change.

She went to church on Fifth Avenue, the one sure retreat of conservatism, and the sermon was about "Christ, the first Socialist."

After that, Bettina gave up in despair.

She thought of all this now, as she sat mournfully in the windy front seat of the bus, with her chin in her hand.

Below her walked New York. As the bus went farther up and left the white arch behind, New York, sauntering past her, seemed to grow gayer with violets and orchids.

Orchids! Should she ever see an orchid

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again, except in a shop window? No, never! She would be a traitor to her class if she wore one. Her adopted class, that is.

Her eyes filled as she reflected that she would probably never sit in a taxi again. She never before had appreciated taxis. Now they seemed to her eye marvels of perfection. Would she ever again even have her carfare on the "L" paid? Darn this equality of women, anyway!

"Fare, please!"

She started. Here she was, caught without her dime ready. Surely if she'd learned nothing else this past month, she ought to have become an adept at paying her carfare.

She looked interestedly at the young conductor as she pushed her dime firmly into the slot. She wondered if he had Bolshevist theories, or if he paid his wife's carfare. Somehow, he looked as if he did pay it.

She thought mournfully of that world from which she was forever shut out, the world where men paid for their own meals, and even for those of the ladies they took out to dinner.

THE BUS CONDUCTOR

She wished ardently that she were safely, sanely, married to the young conductor.

But even as that peaceful thought crossed her mind she remembered Temp's face.

Dear Temp, how very Greek his nose was! And how very innocent his heart! It was adorable being allowed to pay the bills of anyone who could make love in such an enchanting voice!

And by the time the bus had clumsily turned and made its way back down the Drive and the Avenue, and under the Washington Arch, and had swung to its destination, she could climb down the steps with a rush of love for the red brick houses of the Village, and wildly eager to take Temp to tea, was ready to say, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy cause, my cause."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WHITE AND GOLD CHAIR

“OF course, the touch of lips is a more perfect lyric than any words can write,” asserted Temp, “but one can’t go about kissing editors,” he added after a gloomy pause.

Bettina heard the murmur of his voice absently. “Is there anything I can do for you, Temp?” she asked.

He shot a suspicious glance at her, but was reassured. “No,” he said. “What do you think of this for a first line?” He paused impressively, raised his hand, and declaimed in the awed, hushed, but sonorous voice he kept for poetry, more particularly his own:

“There are no drowned men in her eyes.”

“Dear me!” said Bettina, startled.

His gaze was on his paper.

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"Rather good, I think," he said, complacently. He read it again, more sonorously, more awed, more slowly:

"There are no drowned men in her eyes."

"It isn't every day," he mused, "one can write a line like that."

"I'm sure it isn't," assented Bettina politely.

He looked at her fondly. "You always understand me," he whispered.

"Yes," she said sadly.

"Shall I read you the poem?" asked Temp in holy tones.

"Do!"

He took his stand prayerfully, raised his arm, and opened his lips.

"Hoo-hoo!" came a hopeful feminine call from the street below.

"Stick your head out of the window, Temp, and tell her to come on up," directed Betty.

"Come on up, Paula!"

Temp opened the door for her eagerly a moment later.

"I say, Paula, I've just finished a new poem. Shall I read it to you?"

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“ Oh, do, Temp! ” cried Paula sincerely.

Temp absently placed a chair for her, his eyes still upon his paper. Then he took his stand before her, raised the paper to a height which made the sweep of his arm more artistic, threw back his splendid head, and with rapt eyes waited a moment. That hushed pause was a wonderful preparation for the reading of a serious poem, and Temp always got his hearers into the proper mood by an almost unconscious, but most effective use of it. Then his liquid, low, deep, altogether lovely voice began:

“ There are no drowned men in her eyes. ”

“ Oh, Betty, ” interrupted Paula briskly, “ *have* you seen the new red tams at Wana-maker’s? Nessa’s just bought one. Positively sinful, I call it. They make one look nineteen. The mothers of eligible girls ought to do something about it. Oh, *do* go on, Temp, I’m awfully sorry, I’m sure. I just forgot about the poem! ”

Temp looked at her with the calm forgiveness in his lovely eyes with which a martyr might have looked up from the lions in the

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arena toward her. Bettina's heart bled for him, but he bore his hurt nobly. He raised his hand again, waited for an even longer pause, then began:

"There are no drowned men in her eyes."

Paula and Bettina were hanging on his words, awed and hushed. There was a rush on the stairs outside, a buzz of chatter, and, without knocking, Nessa flung open the door and flounced in, followed by Petra.

"Hello, everybody! How do you like my new tam? If it doesn't bring at least four proposals I'll consider that I wasted three dollars! Oh, Temp, what's that in your hand? Poem? New one? Do read it to us!"

Temp's crestfallen look gave way to a trustful, happy smile.

"Read it right now!" demanded Nessa with her pretty, peremptory air of a spoiled child. *"Right this minute! Betty, Sonia's fallen out with Jim at last! Who would have believed it? And Tad's had a poem taken by Century! He's paid his bill at 'Three Steps Down.' You know he used to say that having a poem ac-*

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cepted proves that it's no good, but now he says that art in America is looking up."

"Can't you find a chair, Petra?" asked Betty hospitably. "Just brush that pile of magazines off on the floor. Be careful of that coal. It's frightfully hard to get off your dress."

"Betty, *what* are you going to wear to Bobby Edwards' Cockroach Ball?" It was Nessa's exclamatory, underlined, excited tones again. "I haven't a *thing* but my rhythm rags, and Greek nymphs are *awfully* overdone. Temp, do hurry up and read us that poem. What are you keeping us waiting for?"

Temp hopefully raised his arm half-way.

"Oh, Betty, *have* you any powder? My nose is a *fright*. Thanks. And your mirror. Thanks, *awfully*! Go on, Temp!"

Where was that atmosphere of restful invitation to Beauty? Temp tried to invoke it once again.

He prayed to Beauty with his eyes. Surely people must observe silence when they see a man at his devotions.

But not these girls. It was of no use.

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Chatter, gossip! Temp ran his shapely white hand through his blond hair in anguish.

Betty stole to his side.

"Never mind, Temp," she whispered. "They're not poets, and they don't understand. But to-morrow afternoon's the 'Younger Free Verse Poets' meeting, you know. Don't you remember they're to meet here? And no one will interrupt you *then!*"

Temp straightened. His face brightened. Of course! No one would interrupt then. Poets all, how soothing it would be. The quiet room, the kindred spirits—the unspoiled communion with Beauty! He gave Bettina a grateful glance. Then, more contentedly, but still with a stifled sigh, he folded up his poem.

"What are you doing, Temp?" cried Paula. "Don't mind these infants. Go on, I want to hear that poem."

Temp could have kissed the hem of her plaid walking skirt. A poem really *should* be tried aloud while it is fresh, while the pride of the author still sees the trailing clouds of glory hanging about it.

He moved over toward the window with

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Paula and the loyal Betty, and left Nessa and Petra deep in the planning of costumes and gossip of the Square.

Paula took the only good chair, while Betty sat in her favorite position, on the floor, with her feet curled up under her.

Temp would have liked to choose the floor himself, but he felt that this of all poems demanded surroundings of dignity.

He sat carefully upon a very fragile white and gold chair which was a relic of some long-ago tenant's strivings toward the beautiful. Because of its indisputably spindling appearance, he had always avoided that chair when they had had more room, before the ton of coal had come to make his home its abiding place.

He pulled the patient paper out of his corduroy pocket once more. At sight of it all his satisfaction came back. He knew he had done a good thing—something that would live.

Reading his face, Betty beamed. She, too, realized that this was a piece of Art, and she was to see it before the world could. Tears of earnestness and gratitude misted her eyes.

Temp was ready. He threw back his head,

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ran his graceful hand through his golden hair, and let his face find its rapt look. His eyes were like Galahad's at such moments. But best of all was his melodious moving voice.

He raised his hand once more; opened his chiseled lips:

“There are no drowned men in her eyes ——”

A rending crash broke the hush. A thud. The white and gold chair had collapsed.

CHAPTER XIX

THE STRAP-HANGER TO THE SARDINE

"FREE verse is the Ford car of literature," the boyish poet with black curly hair was saying bitterly. "It's within the reach of everyone. That's why it was so suddenly prevalent."

"Not real free verse," objected Temp loyally. "Anyone can imitate it."

"Yes, but how can you tell which is the imitation? Witter Bynner was better imitating than when he was writing his own stuff," the curly haired one answered gloomily.

"Anyway," said a Russian girl in a yellow blouse, brightly, "Vers Libre has freed us!"

A confirmatory murmur ran round the room.

"From what?" Bettina wondered, and if poets, as a sect, were so unhappy now, what must they have been before they were freed?

The Younger Free Verse Poets were holding their monthly meeting. Betty and Temp, with

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Paula assisting, had had some trouble bestowing them in corners and along the sides of the room in necessary but not too close juxtaposition to the coal.

It was an inspiring meeting. Bettina had never seen so many poets together before. She had known poets were earnest, she had had ample opportunity of late, in fact, to notice it. But the effect of so much earnestness at a given moment in one room was overpowering.

She couldn't remember many of their names, and as they all called each other by the most fantastic nicknames, she was not helped, as the afternoon went on, to straighten them out.

But it was none the less exciting. Indeed, more so. For she half surmised that if she heard the names she'd find them unknown, whereas if she didn't she could fancy that the greatest names in contemporary poetry were borne by her coal-surrounded guests. She was thrilled, through and through.

But her great excitement came, not from the fact that she, obscure little speck, was entirely surrounded by poets, but from her vivid realization of the fact that this was the thirtieth

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day. The month of probation for Temp and all that he stood for, was up to-day.

And she had decided. Of course she wanted to go on with her experiment as she had planned, but deep in her heart she had really decided. She was going to marry Temp. Revolution, poetry, irresponsibility—Temp was so starrily wonderful that he made up for it all.

She had had her moments of rebellion, but they had passed. She was ashamed of having dared to rebel. How could she ever have been so ungrateful! How wonderful all this was!

These soulful thin-faced women, these uplifted boys with dreamy eyes, how she loved to be allowed, quietly and unobtrusively, to look at them!

The men's suits were rather unpressed, and the girls' artistic garments somewhat unhemmed and now and then spotted and coffee-stained, but it was their souls that mattered.

And chief among them, more shabby of coat, but more shining of soul than all the rest, was Temp, her Temp.

Next Betty on the left, sat Paula. Her non-

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chalant presence, and that of Petra and Nessa, now, in the presence of superior numbers utterly subdued, made Betty feel at home.

There was a Philistine present. Betty had had him pointed out by Petra. She had always supposed they were a dark people, like the Jews, but this one had small, blue eyes and was stout and red-faced.

She understood they had done something awful to Saul, or was it Samson, and that all poets had hated them for it ever since. Otherwise she would rather have liked the Philistine, whose name was Jenkins.

Perhaps sensing the fact that there was the bond of the outlander between them, he had taken a seat on the floor at Bettina's right. He had earnestly refused his share of the sofa cushions, and insisted that she have them all.

In spite of herself, this action of his made a warm glow about her heart. Men who are mixed up in causes, and the bleeding heart of humanity, and art, have so little time left for the small courtesies of living. And after a while, even the most contented and loyal Hypatia misses them.

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The company now was bitterly denouncing the ancient outlived tyranny of the sonnet.

"If," propounded Temp magnificently, "I don't naturally think in sonnets, why should I be required to think in sonnets?"

"I don't suppose anyone really *wants* him to, or in polyrhythmic prose either," murmured the Philistine.

Bettina moved a bit farther from Mr. Jenkins. Not that she minded his saying it at all, but it had suddenly occurred to her that it was not dignified to sit quite so close to anyone.

"Never mind him, Betty," exclaimed Paula, indignantly, overhearing. "He's only a tired business man anyway."

"What's this about the tired Business Man?" inquired Mr. Jenkins, genially, half hearing, and turning to the somewhat disconcerted Paula. "Considering the sort of shows written for him, I should say it's no wonder he's tired."

Paula haughtily refused to answer, and Betty was too eagerly trying to catch Temp's golden words, to pay any more attention to Philistines.

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But the earnest poets about her were too eager to talk themselves, and, someway, Betty was of the exact nature to be always singled out as an audience.

A thin young poet was sitting on the floor in front of her, for, seeing that the chairs were heaped with household goods, the guests were obliged to sit on the floor, and, like the spectators of drama in the Greek Theatre at Berkeley, many of them had brought their own sofa cushions.

The thin young poet had turned to her, his eyes glowing with the awed light common to poets in action. He wrote rhymed verse only, and was trying earnestly to convert her. "The exact word," he began, doing things in the air with his hands.

"Yes, I know about the exact word," answered Bettina soothingly and timidly, "but I didn't think anybody except the imagists were allowed to use it."

The thin poet turned from her in despair, and she was able at last to hear what Temp was saying.

"Titles are an outworn convention," he was

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declaring nobly. "Kreymborg had the foresight to do away with punctuation marks, and capitals, and sometimes even with titles, but we should not stop at that. We should firmly and definitely abolish them for all time."

There was applause from a fat poet who never had been able to think of titles for his things.

"Of course," Temp went on, "the poet should have the title firmly in his own mind."

"Oh, yes," murmured the fat one.

"For instance," continued Temp, "I shall read you several little things of my own in which I have used the principle."

He stood up, consulted a paper in his hand, was silent an instant, until the stillness told him that the room was en rapport. At the end of each line he paused impressively. Bettina thrilled to the words he read.

*"Whose passing foot
Disturbed this ant-hill?"*

He lowered the paper and looked at them in triumph. There was a silence of admiration.

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A certain thought held each respectful listener, but no one liked to put it into words.

Finally the fat poet spoke out.

"What was the title?" he asked.

"*'Six O'clock, at Forty-Second and Broadway,'*" answered Temp. "You know the crowds, how they scurry around like ants."

There was a murmur of approval.

The Philistine turned to Bettina brightly. "Do you know, I just thought of a poem. It came to me," he added piously.

Since she did not at all desire to, Bettina murmured politely, "I'd love to hear it."

His exquisitely modulated, low voice murmured:

"If you were not with me . . .

The world would be a cold, unlighted place. . . ."

Bettina did not comment.

"The title of that is," said he wistfully, "'The Camper to His Last Match.'"

Bettina turned a dignified shoulder to him. How dare he make fun of art, and Temp? But, as he said these things only to her, no harm was done.

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Temp was reading others of his untitled bits. The audience and Bettina found them exceedingly vital.

Even the Philistine was listening attentively.

Temp finished reading his un-titled thoughts. A murmur of approbation greeted him.

"Clear-cut as an etching," asserted the fat poet.

"Simple and yet profound," declared the thin one.

Temp glowed. Not that he cared for praise, but still it is pleasant in one's lifetime to have the recognition of one's fellows.

The murmured pæan of recognition died down. A momentary quietness held the room.

It was broken by the earnest voice of the Philistine.

"I have a poem written with the title-less idea in mind," he proffered mildly. "I wonder if you would care ——"

"Certainly, certainly," offered Temp graciously. "We shall be glad to hear it."

The Philistine rose. He was a ponderous, un-willowy, red-faced person, but he had a

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wonderful voice. Wistful, appealing, poignant, haunting. It was a voice which would have made the most banal things beautiful. That voice, joined to the words of yearning and longing and sympathy of his poem would have moved the heart of a stone.

After each line, he paused, his lingering, hurt voice bringing tears to the eyes. He made a long pause before the last word, and then whispered it. One felt the poet's sincerity, his sympathy with the crushed.

*"Small one . . .
Beautiful . . .
I also—understand. . . ."*

The silence was applause, earnest, undoubted.

Temp's voice, when he spoke, was keyed to the intensity of the poem just spoken.

"A lovely thing," he pronounced, moved. "What is your title for it?"

The red-faced man had a clear voice. "'The Strap-hanger to the Sardine,'" he said.

Betty was not quite sure, in the general turmoil of the next few moments, whether the

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Philistine was put out, or went of his own accord.

The indignant chatter had died down, and the poets were again finding each his own sofa cushion. They were all a little sad. Bettina wondered how anyone could have done such a terrible thing. In the crushed silence, Temp summed up the shameful interlude.

"There are some men," said he, bitterly, "to whom nothing is sacred."

CHAPTER XX

PICNICKING ON PARNASSUS

THE unpleasant incident of Mr. Jenkins was forgotten as soon as possible, and the stream of poesy flowed on. "Poisy" one would have said, Bettina supposed. She noticed that everyone present said "poit," and "poim," in a queer, quick monosyllable. They did that at the Poetry Society, also, Paula told her, so it must be quite the thing. And there were many queerer things about poits than their pronunciation, Betty found.

But on the whole, how she liked them! How wonderfully they had all taken the incident of the paint for instance. Indeed, they had been so tactful about it that Betty herself had forgotten it until this instant. The day before, having borrowed a dollar, she and Temp had been seized with a civic zeal to improve the ap-

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pearance of the studio. He had gone across to Sixth Avenue and bought the cans of paint and the brushes, and together they had untiringly painted every chair they could drag out from under the débris. Luckily there was paint enough, also for the table, the box which served as a support for the typewriter, and everything else that could possibly be painted. Then, because they hated to waste any paint, they went over them all again.

Everything was painted a dull black, with decorative clusters at the edges of purple and green sort of circular, globular looking flowers and fruits. It was quite in the Village tradition.

But as soon as everything was finished, Bettina discovered that the smell of the paint made her sick, and Temp that it seemed to have no intention of drying, but came off on everything, so they sensibly moved all the furniture into the hall.

They had forgotten all about it by the time the guests were to arrive, and owing to the hall being very dark, the poets, one by one, or in twos and threes, had stumbled over the furni-

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ture, with disastrous results, particularly to those who happened to be wearing light colors.

Betty was distressed, but what could they do? After the room was half full of poets, they obviously could not bring in the sticky furniture to wreak further havoc. Temp contented himself with standing at the top of the stairs and shouting, "Mind the paint!" at each new arrival, which, since they all took it as a false alarm and a joke, was really not so useful as it might have been.

But, having their minds fixed on higher things, they were a forgiving group, and for that, Betty warmed to them.

She had been stricken with remorse, until she heard Mr. Jenkins smash into the black table in the hall on his way out. Then her heart felt a thrill of gratitude toward the faithful table, alert and vigorous defender; and she was glad that Temp had the foresight to suggest decorating the furniture. Temp was always so clever!

Admiring him so thoroughly, Betty was obliged to admire also his roomful of poets, and she did so. Particularly the men. They were

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so different from certain others she had known, lawyers, for example. Of course, there had been times when she rebelled tearfully against these temperamental, artistic men who were as selfishly devoted to Art as monks and things once were to saving their own souls; but she was ashamed of rebelling. It was only in moments of weakness that she wanted to marry bus conductors, who paid the bills.

She was grateful to-day for having been hauled and hoisted, puffing, up the trail, and allowed to picnic on Parnassus with the rightful inhabitants. How little she deserved to be there. *She* couldn't have written anything like these poems they were reading!

For instance, the one that the inkiest bloused, blazing-est eyed girl was reading now, in a voice awed at the beauty of her own imaginings, something about:

*"Finding words that fit like stones into one another,
And of them building walls
To shut out that sly thief, Death. . . ."*

Betty could almost hear the dots.

Now the intense lady was intoning another:

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*“With all my passion for myself, I am frustrated,
For there is a part of myself that eludes me still.
For that I will but crush my spirit more passion-
ately
And try to forget. . . .”*

“Dear me!” said Bettina. But before one had more than begun wondering what it could possibly mean, the current comment had swept it out of sight.

Now a slim, pale poet rose, awkward, but very earnest. One understood that he had to do with the new nature poetry.

Betty guessed, from looking at him, that he had never gotten nearer nature than accidentally seeing the moon from Fifth Avenue, but, of course, only a reactionary would hold that against him.

“*I had forgotten you,*” he began, tragically, getting out each word with a jerk, and stopping so long after it that his poems were, as he himself might delicately have defined them, beads of syllables on a thread of pauses:

*“I had forgotten you in the forest,
The forest which is so unlike you;
So still, so wise, so calm.*

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*Then a bird sang
Suddenly, sweet, swift,
And flew past me
And I lay sobbing under the stars. . . ."*

That last line was realistic. Betty could readily imagine him sobbing. He was that kind. But how had he ever heard about sword ferns, she wondered, for his next poem declared:

*"The sword ferns over my head break the sunlight into bars like silver
From some mine in Peru
And I clutch at the bars.
But they are too heavy
And fall through my fingers. . . ."*

There was wistfulness in his voice; one was moved to tears.

"Beautiful!" commented Temp, in the silence which was applause. "All the disappointments of humanity in a line."

"Five lines," murmured Bettina.

Then the poet proceeded to put love into a line or two. His mournful, sweet, disappointed voice asserted wearily:

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*“My thoughts of you
Are so many veils
Bound around my eyes
To keep me from seeing
The path to pain,
To keep me from finding
The narrow path
That leads to wisdom. . . .”*

One was obliged to think of love in that tone. It was the tradition among the clear-visioned artistic ones. Betty had a fleeting mental image of the bus conductor. She did not believe he thought of his wife in that melancholy way. But, of course, what did a bus conductor know of love?

The next poem was long and intense, and as full of dripping blood and ruined castles as though it were a composition by Amy Howell.

Only, alas, it so very clearly was not!

Nevertheless, it held the audience in a breathless silence. A silence, however, that was broken all too soon.

There was a noise of stumbling, a knock at the door, and a clear, manly voice sang out:

“Laundry bill!”

CHAPTER XXI

ENTER THE LAUNDRYMAN

“WHAT do you mean?” demanded Temp haughtily, as, the door not having been locked after the Jenkins hejira, the head of the laundryman was thrust in.

It was clearly a rhetorical question only, but the shameless and unabashed laundryman insisted upon taking it literally.

“Bill. Laundry. Clean your clothes,” he explained genially. Then, to further elucidate: “Washee, washee!” and the wretched person went through a vigorous pantomime of rubbing clothes on a washboard.

Temp stood before him in outraged pride, looking as Sir Galahad might have looked if he had been accused of throwing a kiss to a chorus girl.

Temp had not paid for his laundry for

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months. He looked able-bodied and lived in the same block, and they had thought him a good risk. But all things come to an end.

Temp, though a master of words, somehow could not find any on hand to help him at the moment. After a long look he turned away from the laundryman, and addressed the community at large.

His resentment toward society found voice: "They're always blaming radicals for wearing dirty collars," said he cuttingly. "Now you see," he flung out his arm and faced the company with disillusioned eyes, "what happens when you do have them washed!"

Bettina realized that he was right. Even she could see the logic of what he said. It was plain that there was something wrong somewhere. She was not able to right it, but she had no doubt the Revolution would. For, though her faith waxed and waned, she was yet a believer.

The laundryman moved impatiently. He was an unusually large laundryman, to Betty's affrighted eyes, and she clutched Paula's sleeve in apprehension.

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Temp anticipated his visitor's forward movement. "Call in again, will you?" he said.

"Can't do it," said the laundryman.

"I'm busy."

"Can't help it. Come through. Orders from the boss."

Then the laundryman's eyes fell to his own person, and for the first time he realized the results of his stumbling through the darkened hall.

The eyes of the poets followed his. There were smudges of colored paint upon his trousers. The black table, too, had not shirked its duty.

The laundryman's countenance became red, and his eyes flashed rage.

"If you don't pay up, young fellow, you'll be made to!" he said darkly, and he turned and tramped with dignity, tempered with care, through the hallway.

Temp shut the door and locked it, with the satisfaction of one crushing a too-loudly buzzing mosquito.

"All right," he said, "go on. Who's going to read next? You, Don?"

THE LAUNDRYMAN

Betty knew before he began to read that he was not a good poet. He was much too fat. But he was quite as earnest as the thin ones.

And his poems were quite as bad.

Loud and heavy shoes were coming along the corridor, clumping like the gods of the Mountain in the last act.

"The laundryman!" Temp breathed.

There was a hammering at the door, a hand outside turned and pulled at the knob, and then the balked hammering became a fusillade.

"Oh, open it!" Temp gave in wearily. "We might as well! He'll wake the neighborhood."

Bettina opened the door.

But it was not the face of the laundryman that confronted her. She looked her inquiry.

"Gasman!" called out the newcomer, with a menacing look.

CHAPTER XXII

PARNASSUS BESIEGED

"DEAR me!" said Bettina.

The besieger looked past her and over the guest's heads at Temp.

"Bill's been running too long," he announced briefly. "Came to turn off the gas."

"Oh, go ahead! Turn it off!" said Temp bitterly.

And with the eyes of the company upon him, the gasman performed his ceremony.

He had managed to avoid the furniture, by good luck alone, as he came in; but his return trip was not so fortunate, Betty noted with renewed satisfaction.

This time Temp forebore to comment, and with dignity the meeting went on, for a few peaceful seconds, until again the noise of approach could not be ignored.

"What is it *this* time!" exclaimed the host in despair.

PARNASSUS BESIEGED

He was soon to know.

A small, dapper, businesslike man was admitted who handed him a slip. It was all too clearly another bill.

"Electric light," he said, and waited.

Another painful scene ensued. The small dapper man had a bulldog jaw, after all, and the controversy promised to be exciting.

Finally he was repulsed and went off muttering.

"It was foolish, I suppose, to try to have a meeting on the first of the month," remarked Temp to Bettina. "But I never can remember dates. If I'd thought of it, I'd have spent to-day and to-morrow at the Public Library. We're always being urged by posters and leaflets to use it."

It was becoming more and more impossible to continue the meeting. For poetry, especially the newer sort, to be read, requires an atmosphere, a hush, a feeling of the presence of Beauty, and who could maintain that atmosphere in the face of gasmen?

Not even Temp. There were murmurs from one and another of the guests.

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"I think we'd better go."

"No, no," objected their host hastily.

And Paula, settling herself more comfortably beside Bettina, remarked:

"Go? Why, I wouldn't miss this for worlds! Somehow I have a feeling that all is not yet over. I feel as if something more were about to happen."

As if her prophecy brought on the waiting doom, an angry feminine voice sounded below, and a flouncing person came determinedly up the steps, only to run into first one and then another of the exiled articles of furniture.

The contacts did not improve her temper, it was apparent.

"Dear me," said Bettina again. "*She* can't be a bill collector!"

"Now, who on earth," wondered Temp.

The woman flung open the door, and entered, as if on a crusade.

"It's Clarice," explained Temp.

"Dear *me!*" murmured Betty.

Paula sat up straight, suddenly alert.
"Scandal! A cast off sweetheart!"

PARNASSUS BESIEGED

"Clarice, the cleaning woman," explained Temp in a whisper.

"Oh, yes, the sweeping lady." Betty, relieved but apprehensive, now remembered having seen her entering or leaving several times. "But surely, she didn't come to sweep to-day?"

Clarice, the cleaning lady, had been standing in the middle of the room regarding them stormily. Now her wrath surged forth in torrents of words. But Clarice, who had been so christened by Temp, and whose name was not Clarice at all, but only Maria, was Italian, and, though on calm days she knew a few words of English, in anger she forgot them all, and the passionate, lyrical volley of words she poured forth was, perhaps fortunately, quite beyond the understanding of her auditors.

One gathered, however, that she wanted her "mon." With a few interspersed English words, one finally gathered further, that she had worked for many weeks without being paid, and that she proposed to have her due to-day.

"But *this* isn't because it's the first of the

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month," marveled Bettina, as Temp was turning his pockets inside out in a vain attempt to convince Clarice that nothing could be done. "She doesn't know when it's the first, I believe. How did she happen to come to-day?"

Then light broke in upon Temp. He saw it all.

"They've told each other!" he cried. "It's that laundryman. He's gone and stirred up all the rest!"

It was, alas, the truth.

CHAPTER XXIII

CLARICE THE CLEANING LADY

THAT was only the beginning. From that moment, creditors rained upon the poets' party in the studio, and while giving most of their threats to the host, turned to the guests also and scattered maledictions alike on the just and the unjust. Partly because of the unpaid bills and partly because of the paint.

Before Clarice, the cleaning lady, had done telling her tale of woe, she was interrupted by a restaurant keeper from Sixth Avenue who was a friend of the laundryman. Then came Temp's tailor, a swarthy man of an unforgiving disposition, and hard upon their heels, the corner grocer.

The electric light man arrived by accident. He had had no communication with the laundryman; it was simply his day to collect.

Which he was not able to do.

After that, Bettina could really not keep

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track of who everyone was. There was a carpenter from a near-by street, who had put up Temp's bookshelves.

In lieu of his pay he took the bookshelves with him, wrenching them off the wall and rudely tipping whatever happened to be upon them down on the heads of guests, with no discrimination whatever. The shower of books, crockery, and pencils added to the confusion of coal, wraps and poets.

The din was growing. The clamoring creditors outdid each other. Being mostly of Latin races, they did not hide their emotions.

"Oh dear!" cried Betty, almost in tears, clutching at Paula, as being quieter and calmer than most of the poets and much more calm than any of the creditors.

"There, there!" Paula patted her hand.

"This is what comes," gasped Betty, tearfully, "of being a genius!"

"This is what comes," answered Paula severely, "of being an idiot!"

Their eyes turned to the besieged Temp.

"No," returned Betty, "only of loving Beauty."

THE CLEANING LADY

"You see," explained Paula, sanely, "you can't love Beauty as a regular job. You must only do it in your off moments, if you want to keep out of trouble."

"The world," answered Betty loyally, raising her voice to reach Paula's ear above the din, "owes the poet a living!"

"But *you* don't," returned Paula bluntly, "and it's your money he's been living off the past month."

The red flared into Betty's cheeks. Her eyes glared rage.

"How *can* you? Oh, how can you?" she cried.

"It's for your own good, Bettina. I didn't mean to speak, but now I have, I'm not sorry. Everybody helps Temp. Everyone admires his talent, and succumbs to his charm. He's lovably worthless, that's what he is, and you know it. Oh, I admit he's charming! I know he adores you, and you him! But, don't you see, *this* is his nature! He'll always be a charming, irresponsible child. Always!"

"He is a genius," flared Betty, haughtily and sincerely. "And," remembering some-

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thing she had heard, and turning to Paula with finality, "you have no standards by which to judge him."

She went and stood by Temp.

Paula, not to be outdone, went too, and stood next Betty.

The guests were sitting or standing about in various stages of apprehension or enjoyment.

The Muse was forgotten for the moment. Art had given place to Life.

As the laundryman reached more of his acquaintances, and warned them that if they wanted to get any money out of Temp, they had better go to him at once, the creditors' ranks were augmented.

And as all the creditors were talking at once, and some of the poets, the din was incredible.

"Well," Paula turned philosophically to Betty, "it can't get any worse, at any rate."

"No," answered Betty.

At that moment a louder commotion arose in the hall.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LANDLORD AND THE CITADEL OF ART

WHEN the newcomer appeared in the hallway, beyond the open door, even Temp felt that this was the climax, that the end had been reached.

For the stern eye and rock-bound chin belonged to none other than his landlord.

The landlord was of foreign origin; also, it was to be feared, descended from the emotionally Latin. He had a suspicious nature, and even Temp's innocent, boyish face could not convince him now.

For the landlord had come in haste, and all the furniture, perhaps recognizing him, and settling old scores, had left its mark upon him. And it happened that he had that morning donned a new and expensive suit of clothes, of a light gray, against which the splotches of black, green, and purple shone forth in triumph.

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The landlord glared at his tenant.

The trapped tenant glared back. As his eye took in the full effect, even Temp, tried as he was, could not restrain his mirth. He smiled.

That smile was his undoing.

The decorated landlord shot out an arm in denunciation. His speech was brief:

“I want my money!”

Temp began soothingly to explain.

The arm waved impatiently.

“Yes, yes. You said all that. Last month. The month before.”

There was a confirmatory murmur from the other creditors, who had fallen back, and by common consent given the chief part to the landlord, they themselves falling into line as a Greek chorus.

“But ——” began Temp winningly.

“I’m through with talking,” interrupted his opponent. “It ain’t your talk I want; it’s your money.”

“Look here, I can’t pay you to-day, but if you’ll wait until ——”

“I know all that. I heard it before. You

THE LANDLORD

pay me now, now, you hear? I stay right where I am till you do!"

Temp looked at him guilelessly.

"But you'll have to go out for your meals," he suggested.

"I go out to eat and sleep, and I come back, and I stay here in front of your door," he indicated the hallway like a battleground, "until I get all you owe me."

"Hard on your business," hazarded an amused poet from the background. "How'll it get on without you?"

"Never you mind about my business," snarled the injured one, glaring into the shadows. "I been fooled too often already by this young man. He don't get by me this time."

"How on earth," hazarded Temp worriedly to the nearest poet, "am I to keep in a proper writing mood, with that old grouch waiting there every day? How'll I concentrate?"

"That's so," answered the nearest one, sympathetic and worried. "Sure death to anyone's inspiration. You've got to scare him off someway."

"Scare him?"

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"Or bluff him, I should say."

"Well, well," came the menacing growl again. "What you going to do about it? I can't wait all day for you."

Petra edged over toward Nessa and whispered something. Nessa nodded, and they edged toward the landlord. By this time he was standing fairly inside the room. The two watched him warily.

The enemy's eyes were on Temp. With a dart so unexpected that he could not lift a hand to prevent her, Petra was upon him. She gave one feministic push and he was out in the hall. At almost the same instant Nessa shut the door with a slam in his stupefied face, and shot the lock.

The besieged were triumphant for the moment, but only for a moment. They had, as it were, wounded an elephant, and now were to feel the rush of his charge.

The landlord rallied his allies about him, and shoulders and, it is feared, convenient furniture now began to be hurled against the barricaded door. It was clear that in another moment the door would give way.

THE LANDLORD

Temp gave one despairing look toward the window. There was a perfectly feasible exit in that direction, for the fire-escape was unguarded. Temp wavered toward it for an instant, but he thought of his dignity as an artist. It would never do.

Also Temp had always been one to choose the easiest way.

There was a rending crash.

With one convulsive movement Temp darted under the table. Madly shoving aside the folds of the heavy table-cloth which hung to the floor, he crawled under into its dusty shelter. The cloth was of that fearful red affected by landladies, and its lurid pattern did not become Temp's poetic profile as he thrust his head out again for final instructions.

"Look here," he explained heatedly, "when that old brute breaks in, tell him I'm out—gone—and you don't know when I'll be back. Maybe he'll go away then, and let us get on with the meeting."

With one final crash the door gave way, and Temp's head hastily disappeared, just as the avenging landlord, with a roar, burst into the room.

CHAPTER XXV

WAR TO THE KNIFE

IN through the demolished door the avenger strode, his face black with wrath, his fists clenched.

"Where is he?" he demanded, peering about, his rage visibly increasing. "Show me where he is!"

Obviously Bettina had been born for this moment, and she accepted its responsibility with courage in her chin and eyes, in fact, everywhere but her knees.

"He's gone," she said, her gaze shifting more from instinct than cleverness toward the open window.

The invader followed her eyes, and understood. His anger leaped like a kitchen fire under kerosene.

"Good," said he gutturally. "Then someone else pays me." He looked about at the

WAR TO THE KNIFE

guests like an auctioneer, but there were no bids.

Bettina happened to be nearest.

His bluster changed to a whine.

"What kind of a way is this?" he wailed. "What kind of a way, I ask you? I come and I come for the rent, and he say 'To-morrow.' And when I come to-morrow, he say, 'On Monday sure.' And on Monday he say Wednesday, and Wednesday I wait all day and nobody in! What kind of a way?"

"But you must give him time to earn the money," remonstrated Bettina bravely. "How can he work and pay you when you're always bothering him?" She was thinking of the book Temp had been writing, off and on, as the mood came, for the past few years. It was an epic, based upon the story of Harold, the last of the Saxon Kings, and would, she felt certain, and so did Temp, make his fortune, besides, of course, being a distinct addition to literature.

But the landlord knew nothing of Harold the Saxon.

"What is he, the swindler?" he went on.

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His righteous grievance blotted out everything else in the world. "But I make him pay! You shall see! If he shall make a fool of me always you shall see!" Then he remembered bitterly the apex of his woes. His voice went into a shriek.

"The last time I come," he shrieked angrily, "he shut the door in my face. He say 'Go away. I can't see you. I reading a book!'"

"Writing a book, *writing* a book," corrected Bettina.

"Writing a book. What difference?" said the landlord wearily.

At that instant the table-cloth moved. The landlord searched the faces before him with suspicion. All the instincts of landlords had been aroused in his brain. He was being outwitted. But these people should see. Perhaps he had not meant it before, but now he would make good his threat to stay in that hall until he was paid. He would stay there the rest of that day, and they would see. But first he must see his helper.

"All right," he growled vindictively. "You

WAR TO THE KNIFE

see. I come back in five minutes and I stay here by your door till I get my money."

With this ultimatum, and with a lingering look at his victims as if loath to leave them, the landlord turned and made his way out, supposedly to arrange his business affairs for a long absence.

The other besiegers trailed down the stairs with the landlord, and left the hall free.

Bettina, foreseeing that she would face him again, if anyone did, gasped and clutched at Paula.

"The horrid thing!" exclaimed Petra, breathless with enjoyment of the adventure and anger at the landlord.

"Isn't he?" cried Nessa, similarly breathless.

"Let's put an armchair in the hall for him, the most comfortable one in the studio! He'll be furious!"

"And put a magazine in it for him to read," advocated Petra enthusiastically. Willing hands dragged the heaviest armchair out in the corridor, and someone laid a copy of the *Atlantic Monthly* enticingly within it.

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“When he sees it he’ll simply give one shriek!” hazarded Petra interestedly.

“Dear me!” said Bettina, “they carry knives, don’t they? Or something? If only he weren’t quite so excitable. I wish I knew what he’s going to do!”

“You will, in a minute,” answered Petra hopefully.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE LANDLORD DISCOVERS THE ARMCHAIR

IN those moments of waiting, Bettina did not relive her past life and regret her faults, she relived the past month and regretted Temp's.

This last humiliation was but the logical outcome of a month of little worries about money and other annoying trifles. She had excused things, overlooked things, forgotten things, but that was over now. This last was too much. She had to come to the end of that ever-widening vein of self-sacrifice within her. It was only a pocket after all.

The others were chatting around her; Temp, under the table, stuck out his head like a turtle and reconnoitered cautiously; but Bettina saw and heard nothing. She was buried in her own bitter thoughts. She could not live like this, she reflected. Temp was as irresponsible

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as a child. All his friends were dreamy and irresponsible. One needed money to live decently and in comfort, and to not one of this heaven-kissing crew did it seem to occur even to try to get a regular job. And Temp was willing to go to her, a girl, for money! He did not even see that it was degrading. Oh, why had she cast in her lot with such people? Here she was, entangled in the charm of them as a fly in the sticky stuff on fly-paper! And no one to pry her off! Tears of humiliation grew in her eyes. Two driveled like snowballs and rolled down her cheeks. What sort of hypnotic spell had she been under all this time, anyway? How could she have been so gullible? It was all her own fault; and now how should she ever get out of it all again! She had chosen this, and here she was, in the thick of it. Any minute now the landlord would be back.

And what would Temp ever do without her? It was her duty to Art to guard his helplessness from landlords.

But even the glow of self-sacrifice could not keep her from mourning the things she could

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never have again. Those things which had seemed to her before the fatal ball to be so monotonous, so dull, so unbearably dreary, became, now that they were removed from her, unspeakably desirable and exciting.

Exciting! How could she ever have thought that all this mess of plain speaking and high thinking would be exciting? It was taxis, and dinner gowns, and tea at Mary Elizabeth's that were the really exciting things! How wonderful it would be to go to tea at Mary Elizabeth's now! But she couldn't. Never again. How impossible Temp would be there, or in any Fifth Avenue place, with his crumpled corduroys and crumpled hair! How horrible it would be to be stared at as a freak or a companion to a freak! How pleasant it would be to go there with a dull, inconspicuous, proper young man! But she had dwelt in that Eden and had deliberately walked out of it and closed the gate. Now she was barred out forever from all these things.

The girl who marries a free verse poet or bobs her hair has a moment of exaltation at the time, but sooner or later, the realization will

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come to her that she is shut out forever from Fifth Avenue and the Drive, and is doomed to spend her life south of Fourteenth. That bitter moment had come to Bettina.

But the dignity of tragedy was denied her, for every instant she expected to hear an outcry of oaths from the landlord when he came back and discovered the armchair. That was the way among the rich in spirit, but poor in pocketbook, defenders of the citadel of Art—life here was not possible to be lived with dignity, one's tragedies were never unadulterated with sordidness. If one loved poetry enough to put up with defective plumbing, it was all right. But Bettina did not. She knew at last, but had she, alas, learned it too late, that she irreconcilably did not.

From the outer world, from which her thoughts had cut her off, came a hand laid lightly on her arm and Paula's voice sounded, cheerfully protective in her ear:

"It'll be over soon. Don't mind. Of course it's a shock, but when a chick, after being warm and comfortable in its shell, breaks out into the amazing world don't you suppose

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it's shocked too? You're only running up against reality, as our magazine-writing friends would say. Don't worry. Grief's awfully becoming. Good for the eyes. Makes 'em big and dark and twice as attractive."

"Paula, how can you?"

"Oh, easily. Though you'll not have noticed them, there are still splinters of shell clinging about me, too, my dear."

"No," said Bettina, spiritually taking a loyal step backward. "I was just unnerved for a moment. Matters aren't really as bad as I felt. How silly of me! The thing is to think of how to manage that awful landlord. And this waiting is getting on my nerves. What do you suppose is keeping him so long? I want to get that over with anyway. If he'd only come!"

And as if in answer to her invocation, at that instant he did.

The chatting poets heard his approach and were still. The rest of the invaders stood grouped about the entrance down-stairs, awaiting developments, it seemed. The arch enemy came on alone, high dignity and resolve in his

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firm steps. Petra, quite unnecessarily, put her ear to the keyhole. Temp's head, which had been experimentally thrust out from behind the painfully red table-cloth, disappeared hastily.

The steps stopped. There was a pause. The landlord had seen the chair; its significance was sinking in. He was realizing how impudently he had been defied.

Bettina waited, her hands clasped, her lips parted, for his outburst. It did not come.

His discovery had been followed by an ominous silence. It continued, it grew. Then, still without a word, he turned and walked back down the hall.

"There!" cried Paula brightly, breaking the silence within the room. "You see! We needn't have minded. He's gone!"

"Yes," assented Bettina, dazed.

"And he didn't say a thing!"

"No," answered Betty. "And that's what's worrying me. It's too good to be true. It isn't natural. That man is up to something. I don't know what it is, but," her hard-gained new knowledge of life asserted itself, "when a

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man is too angry to swear, that's the time to be prepared. For he's apt to do *anything!*"

CHAPTER XXVII

BETTINA REVERTS TO TYPE

“WELL, good-bye, Betty,” sighed Petra disappointedly. “I suppose we may as well go.”

There was a general wrangling of tams and coats. One saw that the assembly felt it had been cheated of a dramatic climax. It was like an audience leaving the theatre after a play by Giovanitti, the first act of which had contained so many murders that there was no one left to kill in the third.

Betty herself was relieved but apprehensive, like the mother whose sons came home safely from the war; but brought unexploded shells to use as parlor ornaments.

But Temp felt that all was well. In the reaction, he laughed and jested and searched for missing hats with more than his usual gay good fellowship. Looking at him now, one would have scorned to think of table-cloths in connection with that profile.

REVERTS TO TYPE

But just before the first guest and her languid escort were out of the door, a firm, determined trampling, with nothing at all Latin about it, came in its turn up the stairs. Peering out palpitatingly, Betty discovered that it was a blue trampling, and that it had a star.

Over her shoulder, "Fishes' heaven!" ejaculated Don, who rather went in for Rupert Brooke, "It's a policeman!"

It was. And not the jovial kind. It was a grim one.

"What—what does he want?" quavered Betty, who knew very well, but who had been brought up to see the sunny side of things.

"Me!" cried Temp, with a flash of insight and a pictorial groan—a sort of guttural sigh illustrated by a bitter wave of the hand.

"My word," breathed the best-dressed poet, delightedly. "My word!"

Proudly the landlord walked beside the law that by a wave of his hand—a number of waves, to be exact—he had made visible.

"Now, what's all this?" demanded the policeman sternly, as he and his cicerone reached

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them. "You've got a crowd down on the sidewalk at your door. What do you mean by it?" He glared impartially.

He was guided to Temp by the landlord's accusing finger.

"What's all this I hear about you, young man?" His vocabulary lacked variety, but he seized Temp's shoulder in a grip that supplied the appeal his speech lacked.

The landlord, frenzied by the presence of his foe, shouted and danced his accusations over again from the beginning.

The creditors, as though they had been waiting in the wings for their cue, had now become a murmuring mass in the background again. They were coming cautiously a little farther up the steps.

"Well, well," impatiently prodded the policeman, "what have you got to say for yourself, young fellow?"

The guardian of the non-poets of the world looked at Temp keenly and appraisingly. He knew his type well enough to "size him up." He wasn't the kind whom debts would keep from a good night's sleep. He would be just

REVERTS TO TYPE

as apt as not to leave town any day, and sincerely forget about them.

It seemed to Bettina that she had never seen such a large policeman before. It really wasn't fair of the mayor to have them *quite* so big. It was too much like loading the dice. There was no human kindness in him, that was certain.

Bettina gave a faint moan and hid her face in her hands. Paula led her to the back of the room, away from the scene of action, and patted her shoulder as indefatigably and with as correct an interpolation of "There, there," as any gray-haired mother in a thirty years ago melodrama.

Betty sobbed inconsolably and saw nothing for some seconds. The wrangling went on.

Paula kept a firm hand on Bettina's fluffy head so that she might not lift it suddenly and, seeing Temp's mournful face, go again to his rescue.

All might even yet have been well for Temp, had not the poets in the back of the room had that lively curiosity about life which is essential to the artist.

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They pushed. And as they pushed, the helpless ones directly in front of them pushed, and the movement of the mass was communicated to each particle. So it was that the front row, shoved by those behind, was really not accountable for its staggerings.

At this juncture Temp, in making a mild defense, was seized with his fatal histrionic need for gesture, and thrust out his arm in a graceful movement to emphasize what he was saying.

At this moment the nearest poet stumbled against Temp, and sent the extended and astonished arm squarely into the face of the too-near landlord.

Instantly there was an outcry from the waiting ones below, and the policeman, his softened moment passing, seized the bewildered Temp.

"That'll be enough of that, young man," he commented grimly. Temp's explanations were lost in the confusion.

A prolonged wail broke from Betty. "They're taking him to jail, they're taking him to jail!" she cried in despair, and forced her way through the crowd to stand beside him.

REVERTS TO TYPE

The landlord was grossly triumphant, satisfied. Now this upstart would see what the law would do to people that acted so.

"Don't let them take him!" appealed Bettina brokenly.

From below came the sound of voices, feminine and unmistakably derived from above Fourteenth Street. The creditors parted, and up-stairs and past the policeman came two sprightly, well-groomed slummers.

"Ruth!" cried Betty.

"Nadine!" she shrilled again.

"Month's up," vouchsafed Nadine briefly. "Here we are."

"Oh," cried Betty hysterically, putting her head on Nadine's shoulder and weeping, this time voluptuously, luxuriantly, in an access of peace and well-being. She knew that all was now well, Temp was saved.

"Have you got some money with you?" she asked, not dreaming of a disappointment. Of course they had, and that would make everything right. "How much have you?"

"Not a cent," answered Nadine cheerfully, turning her purse inside out.

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“You, Ruth?” asked Betty, hope still strong in her.

“None,” Ruth shook her head. “We’ve been shopping, and only kept bus fare.”

Betty burst into a louder wail, devoid of all belief in providence, Allah, fate or luck.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BETTINA RETURNS TO THE FOLD

THE stillness which had fallen on the company with the arrival of reinforcements was broken. The policeman laid his hand on Temp's arm firmly, resolved to waste no more time.

Then Bettina harked back to her happy past. Once and for all she knew what she had given up.

"Oh, if William Clark were only here!" she exclaimed, out of the longing of her tortured heart.

"He is," said Nadine.

Betty started violently. She stopped in the middle of a sob.

"*What* did you say?"

"Yes," answered Nadine, still not realizing just what all this was about, "yes, he came down with us."

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“ William! ”

“ He said he'd wait and let us come in first,” explained Ruth.

“ How like William! ” Betty almost smiled as she remembered all his scrupulous sympathy. She drew a breath of relief. After all, that was what she craved. She wanted to be taken care of. She had seen enough of adventure, she never wanted to hear of romance again. Bettina had reverted to type. Just a little home of her own, and a husband like William—that was all she asked of life.

But did William still want her? She shivered.

Temp and the policeman were leaving, Temp too bewildered still to even think of Bettina.

“ If he'd only come! ” Bettina clasped her hands in supplication to the god of coincidence.

“ Here he is! ” cried Ruth.

And calmly, fastidiously, courteously, in came William.

With a wild bound Betty clasped her arms about his neck.

“ Oh, William! I've made up my mind! ”

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Then with a sudden change of tone, "How much money have you?"

"Bettina," said William fondly. Then, vaguely, "Money?"

Betty, with the help of the landlord, the policeman, and the poets, explained the situation.

With one arm about the still sobbing Betty, who was crying now from happiness, and the other hand in his pocket, William ascertained what the views of the injured were in regard to reparation. All were satisfied at last, even to the least supers in the mob, and low in the street, and loud on the stairs, the last sound died away.

"Take me away! Take me away!" cried Betty, clinging wildly to William's arm, and sympathetically cuddled by Ruth and Nadine.

The policeman, who had also been satisfied pecuniarily, had discreetly melted away into the dim silence of the stairs.

Temp stood disheveled and still, in a stupor of bewilderment, not realizing, as yet, that the cloud of misfortune had traveled on.

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“Take me away!” cried Betty, more poignantly and dismally.

At this Temp started and came to himself, but when he looked at the tableau before him, he realized that the forces of law, order, and stupidity, were against him, and that genius had lost one more engagement in the never-ending battle between the bourgeois and the intellectual.

He did not attempt to make a defense. He realized his sins of borrowing, and for the first time had the grace to feel ashamed of himself. He had despised William Clark, but now he appreciated, mournfully, but justly, the lawyer's sterling qualities. Clark was a sturdy oak and a safe refuge, but what was there in himself, Temp, of safety and refuge, for a clinging maiden?

“I want to go home!” said Bettina.

Ruth looked superciliously about the studio, and was not favorably impressed by the tangled mass of coal, finery and poets. She might even have been said to sniff.

Nadine, on the contrary, found her surroundings romantic.

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“How interesting!” she exclaimed to Betty, tucking back her veil and preparing for a stay.

Bettina gave one agonized look, which swept the débris.

“No! No! No!” she cried.

The rebellion, which had been so remorsefully put down in Betty’s heart, now broke out in all its violence. All the grievances which she had been nursing, through these four weeks, clamored to be heard. She walked a step away, and unconsciously struck a dramatic attitude, holding out her hand, as if to command silence. She had caught dramatic attitudes from Temp, and the white corpuscles of defense had not been strong enough to repel the invading germs of the disease.

“I feel,” said Bettina, “that if I heard about Casey Jones once more I should commit murder.”

“This is a singing army,” she said grimly, “and I know the words by heart. I have heard them, over and over, night and day. All the songs in the little red book. I have heard so much about ‘Pie in the Sky’ that I never want to see a piece of it on earth again.”

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No one interrupted her. Temp stood as if frozen by this blasphemy.

“Oh, Nadine,” she cried, “how good it will be to get out of this again!”

“But it *is* exciting here,” remonstrated Nadine.

Bettina and William were withdrawn a little from Temp and his group of friends.

“Yes! Romantic!” breathed Ruth, but at that Bettina’s rebellion burst bounds.

“It’s dreary, dull, boring,” she declared. “I couldn’t have stood this another day, it was so tiresome, so monotonous! Oh, William, I will be engaged to you again. I am sorry I was so selfish!” Then her two hands went up to his shoulders, and with all the sincerity of her restless youth in her tones, she breathed:

“How very exciting it will be to marry a conservative!”

Then the two went softly down the stairs, followed by Ruth and Nadine, and out into the sunshine of the Square.

In the studio the silence which their going had made was broken by Temp, giving a great sigh—who could say whether of despair or re-

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lief. He held his graceful arms above his head and yawned. Then suddenly the well-known fire leaped into his eyes, and dragging toward him a little table, he pulled a few crumpled sheets of paper from his pocket, and a pencil from the hand of the nearest poet. He seated himself on a trunk, and prepared to write.

He ran his fingers through his hair, in a fine frenzy. "Oh! It's good to be alone again, and to work! I can do it now, my epic."

Then in a subdued voice, as he remembered Bettina, he added philosophically: "Perhaps it was the best thing after all." And he mused, in a tone composed of a little contempt, and much mournfulness, "Once a bourgeois, always a bourgeois."

CHAPTER XXIX

BETTINA AND THE BALCONY SCENE

WITH his hand tightly on her arm, William led Betty firmly out to the Brevoort, where they found a taxi idling about.

The driver was inside, following the custom which used to prevail at resting places showing the sign "Refreshments for Man and Beast." Only now that horses have gone out and machines come in, the man and beast are so often the same person.

The driver was secured, and the four packed into the rather small and dusty space which would better have served two, and those two affectionately inclined.

But Betty did not even know she was being crowded. She was unconscious of the muddy condition of the floor and the dusty state of the seats. She was perfectly silent, which was an unusual state for her.

Ruth and Nadine insisted on being set down

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at Altman's to shop, so the two had the car to themselves. Then William knew why Bettina had been silent. She had been crying beneath her veil ever since they started. Now she burst into real sobs and wept as if her heart would break.

"What's this? Betty! Why? Oh, what is it?" He was in a fever of anxiety. "Tell me what's wrong!"

"I'm only crying for happiness!" explained Betty, with sniffs between words.

"Oh," William patted her shoulder complacently and smiled pleasantly. He liked personal compliments.

"Yes, I thought—I thought I should never see a taxi again!"

"Oh!" William stiffened. But he had to be human, for the next minute her fingers slid above his collar edge and she sighed approvingly.

"It isn't that their collars are dirty," she explained plaintively. "It's that they don't care whether they're dirty or not."

Then William cautiously put an arm about her in awkward, brotherly comforting.

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"There are lots of uses for a taxi," mused Betty in a low tone, "but," she added, "I didn't think anyone from Boston would know them."

William removed his arm, self-conscious, but the comforting was still there in his quiet eyes.

Betty gave a great sigh of relief, as a ship might sigh, if ships ever did so express their feelings, upon coming safely into harbor, after journeying on a sea, sudden and perplexing and quite beyond the simple understanding of ships.

Bettina began her trial month with William immediately. Then ensued for her one of those perfect periods of life, which, when they happen to people, make them wonder what bolt from the blue is threatening. Their happiness is so great that they know it cannot last.

Bettina knew it could not. Day after day she shivered apprehensively. But the month wore on and every hour of it was more pleasant than the last.

After the first glow of being rescued had passed, she had decided that after all, though she felt almost certain in her own mind, she

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would go on with her plan, and try out William, as scheduled. It really was only scientific, and wise. Besides, she did not want to stop her experiment in the middle of it. She had put her hand on the plow, and she would not draw back.

William still objected, but only in his heart, so Bettina was not at all disturbed. If people did what she wanted, she never troubled her head about whether they wished to or not.

And, of course, William could not help seeing how logical was her course. She explained it all to him so often.

And to Nadine and Ruth also, for she was again in their world. They hovered about her constantly and the three had many discussions concerning Bettina's theories. They all were forced to agree about this particular theory—it had worked. There was no doubt whatever about that.

When the month was nearly over, Bettina already was discussing a tentative date for her wedding. It was to take place about two weeks later, and the girls were all busy embroidering for the trousseau.

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It was to be a very quiet wedding, they had decided, but it soon became apparent that with people who had as many relatives, and whose relatives had as many ramifications and obligations as William Clark and the lateral Clarks, there was no such thing as a quiet wedding.

However, Betty was not dismayed. Her recent experience with artistic poverty made her unduly avid of social pomp and splendor. There was a time when she would have preferred a registry office and a wedding in the sight of God; but now she insisted upon a ceremony, in the sight of all Manhattan; not to speak of the portion of Philadelphia, and Walla Walla, Wash., which had come to see Cousin William married.

Bettina hardly noticed when the month was up, as her decision was naturally already made. She had learned what it was to be comfortable, to have not a care in the world. She drew a deep breath of thankfulness when she realized from what a mistaken step William had saved her. What a doom would have been hers! No resounding and terrifying doom upon the hills

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clutching at one of Dunsany's beautifully costumed shepherds could have held a candle to it. Well, this showed the value of making a thorough test. If she hadn't done that she might have married Temp!

For the two weeks following the fateful month, Bettina, Ruth, and Nadine lived in a mad whirl of incipient lingerie; urgent dress-makers; and rapidly arriving dessert forks and berry spoons.

At last came the day of the wedding. It was to take place at the home of a well-to-do and extremely conservative aunt of William's.

She had Bettina up to dinner, some two weeks before, when the engagement was announced, and had examined her in detail, and severely, in order to ascertain for herself whether or not she would be a suitable wife for William.

Bettina, being very frightened and shy, naturally seemed, at the moment, the meek and mouse-like creature that was her ideal. Aunt Sybil, therefore, entered into the preparations of the wedding with her customary vigor. From wedding-cake boxes to white ribbons

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and orchids, everything was correct. As the hour for the ceremony drew near, the guests surged in. The large drawing-rooms had been thrown together. At the flower-embedded platform, the minister was already waiting. The soprano hum of women's voices, with the occasional bass of their escorts, filled the rooms, and grew louder, and, to Bettina, in a hurried reconnoitering visit to the top of the stairs, more menacing. It seemed to her that all New York was there. Still, why should she mind? She wanted to be married, and to William Clark. She had deliberately chosen him. Then why should she feel this sudden sinking of the heart—this premonition—this panic?

“Bettina!” Ruth had darted out of her room, and clutched her by the arm. “You’re only half dressed. Don’t you know that we must hurry? What are you doing?”

“Nothing,” said Bettina meekly.

Ruth pulled her back into the cluttered bedroom, scolding all the way.

The other helpers had gone, leaving only Ruth and Nadine, to give the finishing touches

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to Bettina's veil, and to see that she had her shower bouquet and prayer-book.

Ruth was as tearful as a mother is supposed to be on such occasions. It was not in Ruth's nature to refrain from doing the conventional thing, in any of the crises of life. Also she gloried in crises. A funeral would have suited her better than a wedding, but lacking a funeral, she was prepared to enjoy the wedding to the utmost.

Therefore she took out her tissue handkerchief and wept broken-heartedly.

"Darn it, Ruth!" Nadine let go the folds of the veil long enough to shake her vigorously. "We're late already! You fasten her slippers!" At this moment there was a knocking at the door and an urgent voice slipped through the crack:

"Girls! Girls! Are you nearly ready? Everybody's here."

Nadine swung Bettina around facing the luxurious, full-length mirror. "There," she said, "you're finished," and as she looked at the vision herself, she gave a gasp. "Why, you're perfect!" she exclaimed, startled.

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Betty had never looked so lovely. Even Ruth, though she hated to admit it, had to agree.

"I am the happiest girl in the world," Bettina said with profound conviction, the tears starting to her eyes in her earnestness.

"If you hadn't said that, it wouldn't have been a real wedding," remarked Nadine. "Every bride has to say it. It's as necessary as the 'I do!'"

"Other brides may say it," answered Betty serenely. "But with me it's true. You see, I have something else beside the wedding to make me particularly satisfied. To-day vindicates all my theories, my beliefs. I'm like a naturalist, a surgeon, an inventor, who's staked his life on a certain thing being true, and at last has proved it. Do you remember the day I told you about my theory? I said I'd make a husband test, and I have. I said it would work, and you didn't believe it, and it has!"

"Yes," Nadine was obliged to admit, "it seems to have."

"Seems!"

"Well, it really has, then."

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"Of course it has. It couldn't fail. The theory was sound. Confess now, I was right."

"Yes, you were," said Ruth, and:

"Yes," said Nadine.

Bettina beamed. She preened herself like a peacock puffed up with pride, as if she herself had invented marriage.

"Every girl should do what I have," added Betty earnestly, "and then she couldn't make a mistake. If I hadn't done this, I'd certainly have married Temp, and what an awful mistake that would have been!"

"Yes, it would have."

"So, you see, I simply made the test and found Temp wasn't the man for me and William was, and ——" she swung round in her wedding dress, posed like a statue, bowed and laughed, "All's well that ends well."

"Yes, but it isn't ended yet," observed Nadine, in her impersonal way.

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that I don't trust these new-fangled methods of trying to get ahead of Cupid, of trying to dodge marrying the wrong man. It's too good to be true. It can't be

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done. Every girl marries the wrong man. She always has and always will. She may make a husband test, but she won't abide by it."

"It's no use looking before you leap; you're apt to land in the same place anyhow."

"Nadine!"

"I'm not telling about *you*, Betty. I'm talking about the average young woman."

"Girls!" came the agonized whisper at the door again. "You've a minute more, but that's all!"

"We must go," Ruth suggested importantly to Nadine. "It's always the custom to leave the bride to herself for a moment. They pray, I think."

"Oh dear, no! Don't leave me," cried Bettina, clutching at an arm of each. "I can't go down unless you are here to push me!"

Nadine half yielded, but Ruth, with centuries of austere, home-making instincts firmly imbedded in her feminine mind, was adamant.

"No!" she said. "We must leave her by herself, if it's only for a second. It's the proper thing to do. Come, Nadine!"

Nadine, rather reluctantly, allowed herself

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to be coaxed through the door. She and Ruth already had on their bridesmaids' dresses of jade georgette, and had finished their own arrangements, even to the last fluff of powder on their noses, before going to Betty. Now they waited solemnly and rather uneasily, at the end of the corridor for her, as they would have to attend her down the stairs, and through the parlors to the platform where they were to deliver her over to William Clark.

As they waited they looked down at the chatting crowd, at the sea of color and fragrance and sound.

"No wonder," said Ruth, quietly, "that Betty is glad to come back to all this after that untidy, terrible studio."

"Um-m, yes," assented Nadine, somewhat doubtfully.

Left behind in her room, Betty stood for a moment, with panic-stricken eyes, then since she was directly in front of the mirror and could hardly avoid the vision of her white satin self, she was seized with unwilling and startled admiration.

What a perfectly beautiful girl! Surely

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this could not be she. How frightfully becoming weddings were! One should have them frequently, she reflected, like shampoos and mud baths, to improve one's looks.

Then her glance fell on the white kid prayer-book in her hand, and her eyes grew solemn. There was a pause in which she thought with awe of the responses she would be making within the next few moments; and the lifelong chains with which those words would bind her. Still they were happy chains. How glad, how grateful she was for that! How wonderful that she was marrying William, who would always take care of her, and make her life comfortable and sure and placid!

How thankful she was that it was not Temp she was chaining herself to! What a terrible thing that would have been! She shivered as she thought of it. What a narrow escape! How nearly her venturesome impulsive ways had come to getting her into trouble! But that was over now; she had been taught a lesson. She would never let her impulses and wishes sway her again.

How good she would be! How well she

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would fulfill her position, like Aunt Sybil, gracious, calm.

As she stood thinking of this she heard a slight sound behind her at the window. She had stood at the window this morning, she had even walked out on the little balcony to which it opened, and listened to the birds singing in the few feet of lawn which Aunt Sybil's house boasted. It was remote, a small bit of garden, for it was at the back of the house, with small windowless buildings rising on all sides.

Remote! She remembered that now, and was afraid. Who was at the window? Could it be a burglar? It must be! And her pearls—William's gift to her—an heirloom, already clasped around her neck! And in the room were other wedding presents! Down-stairs, too, the array of silver with the donor's cards would probably be almost unwatched, while even the servants peered at the ceremony.

She stood tense, rigid, turning over these possibilities in her mind. She had not heard a sound since that first unmistakable one, but she was certain that someone stood at the window behind her. She knew it by that sixth

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sense with which one feels the presence of another person in a darkened and supposedly empty room.

If he would only move again!

She pretended to be doing something to her hair, but, except for her moving fingers, her whole body was tense with listening. But there came no sound. All the world seemed to be still.

Then a taxicab gurgled in the street below, and broke the spell. At the same instant she heard the stealthy, unmistakable rustling that told of the moving of that person behind her.

Frightened into courage, she whirled round, to see a man standing in the open window, about to spring into the room.

CHAPTER XXX

TEMP AS A GOOD PROVIDER

AT the sight of the man at her window, she stepped back against the dressing-table, weak and trembling, her original fear driven out by a real relief and a humorous shock.

"Temp!" she gasped.

"Yes. It's I," he said, stooping and excitedly stepping down into the room. He started toward her.

"Don't!" she cried.

He stopped.

"What are you doing here?"

"I wanted to be at your wedding."

"The wedding's down-stairs."

"Yes," he answered, gloomily. "I passed the front door. I saw it arriving."

"And *you* weren't invited, anyway." There always had been a dare-devil fascination about Temp. He was of the tribe of the ne'er-do-

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walls, the bandits who steal from the staid, illusions, conventions, customs walls instead of money, and every girl loves an outlaw. But Bettina, experienced now, steeled her heart.

"I know I wasn't," his tone was justifiably aggrieved. "Why didn't you? Were you afraid of me? Afraid I'd kidnap you at the last minute?"

She did not answer.

"Because that's what I came for," he finished quietly.

"Dear me," said Bettina. Then she remembered the proper words. "How dare you?" she demanded. "This is no time for joking."

"I'm not joking."

"Oh, go away! Go away! Can't you see you're intruding? I ought to be praying this minute!"

"I should think you would pray. You need to. I can quite understand any girl about to marry William Clark praying for help."

Betty had a sudden vision of William's correct, stiff countenance, and could not help smiling herself. For which lapse on her part she

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naturally punished Temp. She stamped her white satin foot.

"Are you going?" she demanded, exasperated.

"Yes."

"Then ——"

"With you." He looked like a magazine hero, soulful and determined, Temp always looked like something out of a book—but such a very readable book!

"Oh, don't keep on with that! It's nonsense and you know it is. Oh, Temp, do go! I'm getting angry with you. Don't make me be cross with anyone on my wedding day!"

"I never want to see him again," she had said to Nadine and Ruth, in this very room, only a few minutes ago. And she had meant it. How fervently she had meant it!

And now here he was! She wished that he had not come. Did she, she wondered. We-el, at any rate, she knew she ought to wish it.

Not that she was at all afraid of his power over her. Oh, no! He had no power over her. None at all. She touched her wrist experimentally. Her pulse wasn't hurried, her heart

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was not thumping loudly. He couldn't affect even her pulses, much less her judgment. She was only a little sorry for him, that was all.

"Temp, please go," she repeated. "Someone might find you here!"

"Bettina, try me again!" He had taken a quick step forward and was speaking hurriedly with that earnestness which made him so picturesque.

"I did try."

"But don't you know I won't be like that again? I see everything now. It was your going woke me up."

"Don't," she said, but she admitted to herself that penitence was frightfully becoming to him.

"I couldn't let it happen, let you marry him ——" He threw his head back dramatically and the sunlight haloed it like an obedient spotlight.

"You can't stop me," said Betty firmly.

More memories rolled in on him. "Oh, I know it was terrible for you—everything, but especially I!"

"What's the good of thinking of all that?"

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But she loved seeing him grovel. Being feminine, she needed a certain amount of masculine groveling as daily bread.

He held out his hands pleadingly; his voice was convincing, strong.

"I'll be different, sure!" he cried.

"That's the trouble! You've always been different! If you'd only be alike!"

"Alike?"

"You're different from anything and anyone else in the world. Oh, Temp, why were you made this way?"

"It is annoying, isn't it?" said Temp sympathetically.

She stamped her foot. "At any rate, I've been annoyed by it all that I am going to in my life," she announced firmly. "Someone else will have to be the one for the next sixty years."

"You just said this wasn't a time for joking."

"I never was farther from joking in my life! I'm in desperate earnest, can't you see? I want you to go away and leave me alone. If you won't go, I will." Knowing that he would

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not dare to follow her, she started toward the door leading into the hall.

His expression was agonized.

"Bettina! Remember the ball—our first kiss."

"Remember the gasman."

"Have you forgotten our strolls in the Square?"

"No," said Betty briefly. "And I haven't forgotten the landlord either."

"Well, if you *will* persist in remembering the wrong things!"

Then they both smiled out.

"Temp, it's no good," explained William Clark's bride kindly. "You see, I'm not romantic any more. I must think of the future. I should marry a good provider. And you know," reproachfully but just, "you know you aren't a good provider."

"Provider of what?" demanded Temp. "There are some things that I can provide you with that Clark never could if he lived a thousand years."

"What things?"

"Well, romance, if you like to call it that."

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"I don't want romance."

"Yes, you do. Every human being does. It's the one thing you can't live without. Really live. Romance is like salt, so precious that tribes that can't get it go mad. Look at deer and salt licks. Well, people have to have romance served that way for them in chunks, at intervals. Their system needs it."

"But I've eaten too much salt. I can't get the taste out of my mouth. And so it's very soothing and cooling——" She waved her hand toward the door that opened on to the stairway leading down to the altar and the end of Betty Howard; and Temperament understood.

Only the boudoir clock answered then.

After a moment Temp said something very low: "When he kisses you, when he touches your hand, can he make you feel as I can?"

Betty shivered in her finery. That was something she had never allowed her real self to ask her practical self—because she knew the answer.

From her silence Temp knew too.

"Don't fight it, Betty!" he cried in a ring-

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ing voice, though carefully lowered for fear of what was on the other side of the door. "We love each other, and it's no good trying to deny it! Don't you know it's true?"

Betty stumbled to him, broken, weeping, but restored, whole, fulfilled. They stood facing each other, not touching, but his eyes deep in hers.

The spell of practicalness had left her, and she breathed freely once more. Perhaps the ozone she inhaled was illusions but it was the air she needed to keep her alive.

CHAPTER XXXI

“SO THIS IS LOVE!”

THERE has, for some time, one understands, been an unsolved mystery about the way of a maid, not only with a man, but with a vote, a pet dog, a golf club, a crocheted tidy, or any other thing she happened to manipulate.

But really the prevailing idea is most unfair to girls. For if men are tools in their hands, they themselves are but tools in the hand of Something Else. And it is most disturbing to find ourself being whirled about without one's own permission, like a golf stick swung about in space. No one can blame a golf stick for the violence with which it hits the golf balls. Indeed the experience must be bewildering for the club.

The present experience was bewildering to Bettina. Her practical self had lost after all. And she was glad. How good it was not to have to tell herself she didn't like Temp, to tell

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it so accurately and circumstantially and with such wealth of corroborating reasons that she believed it herself.

She still remembered that mass of reasons, she knew that Temp wasn't the man for her, but she knew, too, that she loved him. And she divined that he, too, had been through the same struggle, that he had rebelled against his fate and been conquered. She wasn't his kind and he wasn't hers, but something stronger than themselves drew them.

"So this is love," said Betty in dismay.

"I guess so," assented Temp dismally.

"Oh dear!" wailed Bettina, sitting down limply.

"Uh-huh," Temp agreed. Then he went on. "It isn't logical. I should marry a radical girl of over thirty who'd mother me, and make our living doing settlement statistics for some social service bureau. And you, of course, should marry William Clark. I should think *anyone* could see that. *Anyone could* except this ridiculous blind force that lecturers talk so much about, blast them! And now it's got us!"

"SO THIS IS LOVE!"

"Just after we've fully decided we don't want each other," agreed Betty mournfully.

"Oh, Temp," she asked hopefully, "don't you think you could forget me?"

"Know darn well I couldn't," growled Temp. "Tried. My God, you don't think I *want* to love you, do you?"

"No, of course not," she interposed soothingly, reaching out and patting his hand.

"Neither of us want to," she added.

It was foolish, unpractical for her to care for him, but she did. Madly. It was absurd for him, financially ruinous, to care for her. But he did gloriously.

"Dear me," said Bettina to herself. She knew now what radicals meant when they talked about how badly the world was governed.

"Then come, Bettina!" he was begging.

"No."

"Come!" He seized her hands.

Bettina pulled them away and put them behind her, backing away hastily.

"Think, oh think, what it would be! How

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would we live? I've no money left. And you ——"

"I'll work my fingers to the bone for you, Bettina," he said, his heart in his eyes.

"Oh, Temp! No. You'd let your fingers be chopped off if it would do me any good, for that's something that could be done in an instant, and it's dramatic as well—but as to working them to the bone—that would take steady application over a term of months. I'd say—no, Temp, you wouldn't do that!"

"Bettina, don't be botanical! You dissect my flowers of language under a microscope. You should shut your eyes and drink in their fragrance instead. But here we stand talking!" He had a suspicion.

"You've let me get talking on purpose," he denounced her, "to put me off till it's too late. Once and for all, are you coming with me?"

She shook her head.

"But you said you loved me!"

"I could if I'd let myself. But it won't do."

She picked up her bride's bouquet of stiff prim lilies of the valley and her white prayer-

"SO THIS IS LOVE!"

book, and behind this rampart she faced him.

"I can't. So good-bye," she said, then her face grew agitated. She waved the shower bouquet frantically, and gestured with the prayer-book toward the open window.

"Hurry!" she gasped. "Someone's coming!"

Someone undoubtedly was.

"Don't let them see you!" She flung open the door slowly and stood in it, herself and her flowing finery shielding the room, until he should have escaped.

But his coat caught on a projecting chair arm and pulled him back. It was Temp's luck.

And so it happened that when an indignant Ruth and Nadine entered they found a still more indignant Temp, making frantic and terrified efforts to escape. He was half in and half out of the window when they discovered him, and there he remained, uncertain whether to stay or to go would prove the worse disaster.

The bridesmaids were struck dumb with amazement. But Nadine, always self-pos-

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sessed, came forward pleasantly. "How are you?" she asked.

"Never felt better and had less," answered Temp cheerily.

CHAPTER XXXII

FOR YOU A VIOLET

BUT Ruth advanced toward him like a hen protecting her chicks.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded. "You have no right! This is an outrage!"

She looked so regal in her splendor of apparel, and Temp so crestfallen and out of place in his crushed corduroys, that Bettina's sympathy was aroused.

Ruth continued to belabor him.

Bettina stepped forward impulsively and laid her white-gloved fingers on Ruth's. She could scold Temp herself, but she wouldn't let any other girl do so. Ruth turned at her unuttered remonstrance.

"But what is he doing here?" she objected, horror in her tones. "It's your wedding day."

"That's why," said Bettina. "We're going to be married." She went and stood by Temp.

THE HUSBAND TEST

"What do you mean?"

"But Mr. Clark? What *will* he say?"

"I'd love to hear," answered Bettina candidly. "But I can't stop to. We must hurry off. We're going to ——?"

"City Hall," Temp supplied, practical for once.

At this awful moment, the borrowed church organist, as if diabolically inspired, struck up "Here Comes the Bride."

The four were stricken. All stood rigid, in the attitude in which the music had surprised them, like a group of living tableaux at a charity entertainment.

"You can't leave now," Nadine whispered.

"We were sent to get you," Ruth explained, remembering.

"The flowers, the minister, Aunt Sybil," murmured Ruth.

"William!" Bettina added with a groan.

"Let's go!" said Temp.

"You can't!" Ruth was looking at Bettina aghast, seizing Betty's arm and pulling her toward the hall. "They'll all be here in a minute to see what's wrong. Lock the door,

FOR YOU A VIOLET

Ruth," advised Nadine. "You're insane, Betty, quite."

Ruth went sulkily to lock the door.

"If you *must* do it," Nadine promised, "we'll gain all the time we can for you. We won't tell them about Temp and we'll send them in wrong directions. A license doesn't take long, and dear knows the ceremony doesn't, and you'll be out of town before they've a trace."

Bettina was not listening. She had taken Temp aside and pulled with her immaculately gloved fingers at his corduroy sleeve. Her eyes were fixed on his imploringly, trustingly, desperately.

"If I come," she begged, knowing well how useless it was and yet being a woman, hoping anyway, "promise you'll change? You'll be different about money? You'll look ahead? Be saving? Count the pennies?"

"I promise," said Temp truthfully, and kissed her hands; and no woman can disbelieve the promise of a man who kisses her hands. It is not in nature to.

"Poor William," said Nadine.

THE HUSBAND TEST

"Yes," answered Betty, "for Ruth will set her cap for him now. They may be able to use the same wedding cake. Economical."

"Sh! She'll hear."

"Do her good." Betty made a grimace.
"Yes, I'm hurrying."

"And now what can I do for you, Betty?" Nadine might disapprove, but she always helped.

"My cloak! It will cover everything!"

But Temp was looking farther ahead.

He drew Nadine to one side. "Do you happen to have any money about you?" he whispered anxiously.

"What! You haven't anything in the world?"

"Spent my last nickel to come here on the 'L,'" he confessed.

She emptied her purse into his hand, with its jumble of dimes and quarters. "That will only just pay for the license and taxi," she said. "And this is the only bit I have with me." Fumbling in her blouse she drew forth a cloth pocket and from it a twenty-dollar bill. "Ruth, have you any change with you?"

FOR YOU A VIOLET

"Not a cent," said Ruth. "Didn't even bring a purse, for I knew you'd have carfare, Nadine."

"This is enough," Temp hastened to assure her.

"Yes, it will last us a week easily where we're going. We planned it long ago. A quiet village hotel over in Staten Island," said Betty, fastening her long cloak. "And by that time something will have turned up. Temp may sell a story or something. It will keep us till we've time to turn 'round if we're careful."

"And we are going to be careful now," she sang radiantly.

"They're coming!" warned Ruth at the door.

Betty sprang to the window. Temp pulled her through and tenderly guided her down the fire-escape into a new life.

The deserted bridesmaids listened, quaking, to the footsteps, but they went on past the door.

"Some servant," said Ruth, relief in her face, then more sternly, "We must go and tell them."

THE HUSBAND TEST

"No. Everyone would see us on the staircase. Let's wait till someone comes."

"Yes." They were lost in musings.

"Just when he had demonstrated thoroughly that he's the worst person in the world for her, she takes him!" Nadine murmured. "She proved her theory, made her test, found out what to do—and then deliberately did the opposite!"

Then Ruth gave voice to a truth greater than she knew.

"Perhaps," she suggested, "she can't help it. Perhaps," she ventured, "women are like that."

Nadine closed her eyes with the calmness of despair. "I shouldn't wonder," she answered, "if you're right."

Ruth tidily closed the window and picked up the abandoned shower bouquet.

"Well, after all, it only proves Betty was brave," went on Nadine. "Temp is a high-brow ne'er-do-well. We've always had the ne'er-do-well type with us. The girl of generation-before-last saw the reckless young man and cautiously passed by on the other side, but

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the girl of the twentieth century, bless her heart, takes a chance."

"No." Ruth wisely shook her head. "It isn't courage. It's just impulse, that's all."

In the speedy taxi, Temp and Betty were discussing this cyclone that had taken them up and hurled them into space, at least had hurled them into a taxicab stand around the corner.

"It's love," diagnosed Temp, and Betty put her head on his shoulder trustfully, assured that her husband knew everything. After all her rebelling she was destined to be a spouse after St. Paul's own heart.

Apart from some difficulty about remembering their mothers' maiden names, they found that the license indeed did not take long, and the ceremony was so suddenly over that it left them breathless.

They were blissfully unconscious of the fact that at the home of Aunt Sybil the organist had played "Here Comes the Bride" three times, but the bride never came.

Upon that, pandemonium ensued, and Nadine and Ruth found themselves the unwilling storm center.

THE HUSBAND TEST

Temp and Betty had forgotten even that Aunt Sybil existed, and if anyone had mentioned William Clark, they would probably have had to rack their brains to recall where it was they had heard that name before.

The taxi from the City Hall to the Staten Island Ferry took almost the last of Nadine's change, and the ferry tickets quite finished it.

They were in plenty of time. The boat had just touched. Temp put Bettina on board.

She held her cloak carefully about her, lest any telltale white satin show. She was sorry she had forgotten her lilies of the valley, but, of course, she would not have wanted them anyway, as they had been bought by William Clark, that splendidly null young man who, Bettina was certain, must have been able to trace his descent back to the most impossible of husbands, King Arthur.

But she was not thinking of that now.

How wonderful to be out on the water with Temp! They would pretend they were on an ocean voyage together. They would be alone, far away from everything but joy, beauty, love.

FOR YOU A VIOLET

And there, over on the island, when the boat touched land, a new life would begin for her, for them. A happy life rooted in security, safety. For Temp was different now. He had promised. He would never live in that careless, lily-of-the-field way again, not keeping a penny ahead for the next day. She could not have borne that. But now—how happy she was!

They had barely stepped on board the boat when Temp exclaimed, "Oh, I wanted to get a paper! Mind, dear? There's time."

"Hurry!" Newspapers were far from her ken at present, but she knew Temp's queer New York way of not being able to exist without them. She waited, standing by the rail, dreaming.

Temp, with nothing in his thoughts more dangerous than the intention of procuring a newspaper, rushed to the news stand.

But he had nothing but the twenty-dollar bill, and as he took it out of his pocket, and opened his mouth to ask for his favorite paper, his eye was caught by the florist's display unfortunately placed next to the news stand.

THE HUSBAND TEST

At the rail Bettina smiled, dreaming—but her mouth drooped wearily too.

She was so tired. She wanted so to get a room somewhere, and wash her hands and face, and rest, rest, rest. Well, she would be able to in a few moments. How lucky Temp had that twenty! If she couldn't have rested soon, she felt she would simply die!

Just in time, Temp sprang, panting with haste, to her side.

"Your paper?" she opened her lips to ask, but instead gave a gasp of surprise and horror.

But he did not see.

Her face went white with dismay.

But Temp stood, beaming and pleasantly conscious of virtue, like a Boy Scout who has just done his daily good deed.

His arms were full of fragrant purple violets, oceans and plains of them, masses of blue loveliness and perfume. Yes, he confessed gaily, when taxed. He had spent the whole twenty dollars for violets!

Bettina stood turned to stone. What would they do—where eat, where go? What could they do when the boat touched shore? And

FOR YOU A VIOLET

worse, ah, worse, this proved that he had not reformed at all. What would their future life be!

But Temp, beaming and joyful, did not think of that. He was thinking only of her. His worship and adoration shone from his wistful face.

His soul was in his eyes, and Bettina could not help melting as she looked.

He held the ocean of violets out to her. "I had to get them for you. They're so like you," he whispered. "So fragile and delicate and sweet."







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